

SHEAVES

POEMS & SONGS BY RABINDRANATH TAGORE

SELECTED AND TRANSLATED

BY

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PREFATORY NOTE

WITH some few exceptions the poems and songs in this volume have not yet appeared in translation. The translation throughout is nearly literal and the medium adopted is the vers-libre, the arrangement of the lines being retained as in the original text. Only one poem has been rendered into rhyme and a few others have been translated in prose. The headings of several short pieces as well as the name of the book have been chosen by the Translator.

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RABINDRANATH TAGORE: THE MAN AND THE POET

STRONG in the human heart is the desire to claim kinship as between man and man, between the man standing in the ruck and the man standing apart on an eminence which others may not share with him. It is this human feeling and not merely the spur of curiosity that stimulates the desire for knowledge about the personal peculiarities of great men and women. The baser form of curiosity is usually satisfied with the knowledge of such important events as the donning and doffing of a royal hat, but men desire to know of the ways of men who are not great by the accident of birth, but in their own personal right, the rare gift of a divine afflatus. Between all men there is the bond of a common humanity, common frailties and a common mortality. And when some man towers above his fellows because he happens to have been touched by the magic wand of genius, men wish to assure themselves that he is still one of them, unlike them in some respects but very like them in others.

Of the millions that come and go in the never-ending procession of life and death the world retains no trace: a pinch of ashes here and a handful of dust there, dust unto dust. The earth covers the nameless legion with the mantle of oblivion. Not all: for now, and again, out of this mass of vanishing humanity some one leaves behind him some living thought, some deathless message, some creation of beauty that does not die, that eludes the death-grip of time, and

pulses and throbs with life through the passing centuries. The two are easily detachable, the man who goes the way of all flesh and the achievement that does not depart. It is of such a man that we wonderingly ask, what manner of man was this that lived and died as other men, and yet is living still, deathless in death?

If it were not for the heritage left by such men humanity would be poor indeed, with the stark poverty of a barren and arid past, a flat and unstimulating present and a future without promise. Here in India millions who look upon Rama as an incarnation of God and utter his name living and dying are barely conscious of what they owe to the Rishi who composed the Ramayana. Those who speak of the principal characters in this sublimest of epics as mere myths do not understand that to a whole nation Rama is as real as the conception of the deity in many lands. History is a thing of yesterday and most of the great things happened long before history came to be written. The Ramayana is not merely a book to be read at leisure and to be put back on the shelf, but it has been for more years than history can count an important part of the spiritual pabulum of one of the most ancient races of the world. Every stratum of Hindu society is penetrated through and through by the living influence of the story of the Ramayana. Rama, intensely human in his trials and sufferings, is an avatar whose divinity has never been questioned; Sita, whose life-story is a long-drawn tragedy, is the ideal of all womanhood for all time. Year after year the passion-play of the Ramayana brings home to the

mind of the humblest Hindu its power and pathos, its idealism and its lofty teachings. And yet but for the Rishi-bard Valmiki there would have been no Ramayana, none of the characters which are as immortal as the gods. Beyond what is mentioned in the epic itself, we know nothing about this earliest and greatest of poets. What, again, does the world know about Kalidasa, the master-singer who saw and depicted beauty as no other poet has done, before or since? The man, however great, passes, indistinguishable from the herd; his work, if it bears the hall-mark of immortality, endures.

And hence this human and normal interest in the latest Indian poet, whose fame encompasses the world today, whose name is on every lip and whose likeness is to be found in a hundred thousand homes in every country in the world. No modern poet has ever attained such fame as has come to Rabindranath Tagore. There is scarcely any language in the world in which some of his works have not been translated, there is hardly any important city in the world in which his figure has not been seen and his voice has not been heard. He has moved as a classic writer whose place among the immortals is already assured. And everywhere men and women have waxed enthusiastic over the dignity and fascination of his personality. This is the appeal of the man to his fellow-men as distinguished from the impersonal appeal of genius apart from the man and unrestricted by limitations of time. A great man of genius may be physically unattractive, but in the case of this Bengali poet nature has been bountiful inside and out, and the distinction of the

man is as remarkable as the genius of the poet is great. As he appears today, with the fine lineaments of his face and his silver locks, flowing beard and wonderful eyes he resembles a Rishi stepping out of a sylvan glade in ancient Aryavarta, or a patriarch full of wisdom moving in the sight of God. I can recall him as he looked when he was just twenty years of age, slender, tall, with his black hair curling down to his waist. He was fairly famous even then as a poet and an elegant prose-writer. I remember an eminent Bengali writer,* who died several years ago, then wrote about Rabindranath Tagore predicting a great future for him, but warning him against being carried away by the plaudits of the public. It was a rhetorical effusion addressed to "Brother Handclap" and entreating the said brother not to turn Rabindranath's head by excessive demonstrations of goodwill. I wonder what this writer would have thought if he had been living today and had been an eye-witness to the world-wide homage that has been the guerdon of the poet. Brother Handclap has not succeeded in doing much damage to Rabindranath. As a matter of fact, an answer to this writer was anticipated in one of the early songs of the poet:—

"Have I come into the world as a beggar for fame, to win handclaps by stringing words together? Who will awake today, who will work, who wants to wipe out the shame of the Mother?"

A few years later Bankim Chandra Chatterji, then the greatest writer in Bengali literature, and the author of the *Bande Mataram* song, suggested to

* Akshay Chandra Sircar.

Rabindranath that he should write an epic poem to establish his reputation as a poet. The reply came after some time in some beautiful lines addressed to the Lyrical Muse as his beloved:—

“I had a mind to enter the lists for the composition of an epic poem, but I do not know when my fancy struck your jingling bangles and broke into a thousand songs. Owing to that unexpected accident the epic poem, shattered into atoms, is lying at your feet.”

Nearly fifty years of comradeship may constitute some slight claim to an intimate knowledge of a man's nature, though I am not so presumptuous as to imagine that it is of any advantage in measuring the poet's genius. His works are accessible to all readers and competent critics, either in the original or in translations, and are already a part of the literature of the world. Still I have the memory of having listened to many poems and songs fresh from the pen of the poet and recited or sung in his matchless voice, of many intimate rambles in the flower-strewn fields of literature, of wide ranges of conversation. Many of the friends who forgathered with us are no more, and as the sunset of life is coming on apace, the lengthening shadows of the past are receding in the distance behind us. The years that have brought much fame for Rabindranath have also brought him many sorrows, domestic bereavements of which the world knows nought.

Of school and university education Rabindranath has had no share. As a boy he attended school for a very short time, but his delicate and sensitive nature rebelled against the thoughtless indiscrimination which

passes for discipline; neither was the companionship of the average school-boy to his liking. He shook the dust of the school from his feet after a brief experience, but at home he was a careful and diligent student, and he began composing poetry at a very early age. He went to England as a young lad, but he did not attempt to qualify either for the Indian Civil Service or the Bar. He read, however, for some time with Mr. Henry Morley, who was much struck by the elegance and accuracy of Rabindranath's English composition. During his sojourn in England Rabindranath used to write Bengali letters, which were published, descriptive of his English experiences. For a lad in his teens the descriptions were remarkably vivid and showed considerable powers of observation. On his return to India two things were noticeable: he was entirely unaffected by his visit to England in his ways of living. He never put on the European dress and acquired no European habits. The other thing was that in spite of his undoubted command over the English language and his extensive reading of English literature he rarely wrote English. All his literary work and even his correspondence was done in Bengali. Until he began translating his own poems he had made no serious attempt to write in English, and now by his translations, his lectures and his letters he ranks as a great original English writer.

If genius is a capacity for taking infinite pains and hard and sustained work, the Indian poet has amply demonstrated it by his unswerving devotion to literature. Of course, the original spark must be there, for it is absurd to contend that genius is latent in every

man and can be brought out by unremitting toil. You cannot delve down into the bowels of the earth anywhere at random to find a precious stone. Our poet has fed the flame of his genius steadily and loyally, and the light that he has kindled has penetrated as a gentle and illuminating radiance to the remotest corners of the earth. Poetry, drama and fiction have been enriched by his contributions, and he has shed fresh lustre upon various departments of human thought. Nor has he been heedless to the call of his country, though his temperament is unsuited for the din and jar of practical politics. He presided once over a political conference and delivered a profoundly thoughtful address in Bengali. When Bengal was embittered by the partition of that Province and feeling ran high, the heart of the poet-patriot was deeply stirred and the songs he then composed were sung everywhere, at public meetings and in processions, by prisoners in prison vans and prison cells, by women in the home and by boys in the streets. Two or three years later Rabindranath narrowly escaped having a signal political distinction conferred upon him by the Government of Bengal. He had read a certain paper in Bengali at a crowded meeting in Calcutta and it was published in the usual course. Shortly afterwards he received an official letter from Mr. Chief Secretary Macpherson conveying the warning of the Bengal Government against what was considered a seditious speech. The Government stayed their hand so far that they did not forthright launch a prosecution. Rabindranath told me that he sent no reply to this letter, but though this little

incident is not generally known it is well worth being recorded as the first official appreciation in India of the Indian poet. For some time the school established and maintained by Rabindranath at Bolpur and now known all over the civilised world as Visvabharati was under grave suspicion as a hotbed of sedition. It was a fair and accurate index of the working of the official mind in India.

A few more years passed and the Nobel Prize for Literature was awarded to Rabindranath Tagore. How did this come about? The panels which make the selections for the award of the various Nobel prizes are constituted of men who know nothing about the language in which the works of the Indian poet are written. It is contemptuously designated an Indian provincial vernacular language, as if every living language in the world is not the vernacular and the mother-tongue of some people. English may be a classical language, but we have not heard that the vernacular of England is Hebrew! All that the judges had before them was a thin volume in which the poet had rendered into English a few of his original poems in Bengali. It was not a metrical translation, but the spirit and soul of poetry were to be found in the marvellously musical and rhythmical lines. They disclosed a hitherto unrevealed subtlety of fascination in the English language with delicate nuances of the poet's own touch. Even so the judges could have scarcely realised that in going so far east as India and making a selection from a race ruled by a nation in Europe they were conferring a great honour upon the Nobel Prize itself, for in the list of

Nobel prizemen no name stands higher today than that of Rabindranath Tagore.

A large and influential deputation from Calcutta waited upon the poet at Bolpur in his country home, well named the Abode of Peace, to congratulate him on his having been awarded the Nobel Prize. In his reply the poet spoke with a shade of bitterness. Was not all his work done in his own country and were not his books accessible to all readers in Bengal? Those that had given him the Nobel Prize had only seen a few of his poems in translation and did not know a word of the language in which they were originally written. The poet was right, for was it not humiliating that his countrymen in Bengal should have waited for the recognition of his genius to have come home all the way round from Europe? In the introduction, written about this time, to his valuable work, "A Study of Indo-Aryan Civilisation," Mr. Havell writes:—"If Anglo-India or the Calcutta University had awarded a prize for literature, open to the world, neither would have discovered a Bengali poet." Unfortunately, it is a besetting weakness of our people that they see through other people's eyes and cannot always appreciate worth for its own sake. If a man gets a good Government appointment or some trumpery title, there is an epidemic of entertainments in his honour and he is acclaimed as a hero so long as the novelty of his distinction lasts. If not widely popular, the name of Rabindranath was a household word in Bengal even before the Nobel Prize was conferred upon him. His poems and specially his songs were known everywhere and there was not

a single Bengali home in which his songs were not sung. The most striking tribute is that of imitation and this has been rendered to him in abounding measure, for at the present time there is hardly any Bengali writer of verse who has not imitated Rabindranath's language, his metrical originality and versatility, and his unmistakable distinction, though of course the supremacy of the Master remains undisputed. When he was fifty years of age, his educated countrymen of Bengal made him a public presentation in the Town Hall of Calcutta, an honour which has not been shown to any other Bengali writer. Moreover, has it often happened that full and adequate appreciation has come to a great writer or a great man of genius in his own lifetime? Such a man lives in advance of his times and it takes time for later generations to arrive at a proper understanding of him. The world was not always the huge sounding board and the rounded whispering gallery it is today and great books were written without the world hailing them as important literary events. Was not William Shakespeare an obscure individual in his lifetime, and he lived only a little over three hundred years ago? Victor Hugo says that it took over three hundred years for Shakespeare's fame to cross the British Channel and that also when Voltaire introduced the name of the English poet to French readers.

The Nobel Prize looms large in the world's estimation and yet one wonders whether a money prize is the best tribute to genius. For a struggling author the prize is a considerable sum of money and Rabindranath himself has received letters inquiring how the Swedish prize for literature may be won. But while

it is only about eight thousand pounds of English money, a heavy-weight boxing champion may earn a prize of eight hundred thousand dollars by having his head and face mashed into pulp!¹ Rabindranath himself kept no part of the Nobel Prize money for his own use, but handed over the whole amount to the Visvabharati. Literary giants like the late Anatole France and George Bernard Shaw have refused to retain the money of the Nobel Prize for their personal use. But the present age is ruled by the almighty dollar and the greatest writers are those whose books are considered the best sellers in the market. Judged even by this standard Rabindranath easily holds the first place, for a single German firm has sold five million copies of some of his books. To borrow a phrase from the turf, it is the best stayer that wins a race, and the life of a book is to be measured not by its vogue for a season but by its passing the ordeal of time.

What detracts greatly from the intrinsic value of the Nobel Prize is that it is an annual award. How is it possible to discover a great name in literature every year when a century may pass without producing a really great writer? Consequently the prize has frequently to be given to mediocre writers whose reputation cannot be enhanced by any prize. It is somewhat like the appointment of a poet laureate in England. What great names besides those of Tennyson and Wordsworth are to be found in the list of English laureates? The royal seal and sign manual can create ministers and governors but not a poet who fills his place by right divine and holds a commission

¹ Jack Dempsey when he lost his championship.

from God Himself. Lord Dewar, a master of epigram and perhaps the wittiest living after-dinner speaker, recently said at a dinner of an Institute of Painters in London, "Poets are born—and not paid." This fine epigram was garnished with a story about the present English Poet Laureate, who refused to give the press reporters an interview when he happened to be in America some time ago. The next morning the New York papers came out with the attractive headline, "The King's Canary Won't Chirp!" The King's canary is sometimes only a house sparrow faked to look like a canary, but its chirp gives it away. Nor can a gift of money add to a poet's reputation. Money is here today and gone tomorrow, and has no element of stability. Therefore, in ancient Rome they crowned the poet and the man of genius with the laurel crown, a handful of evergreen leaves, emblematic of the freshness and immortality of fame. It could be had for the mere plucking but not all the gold in the world can produce a single leaf of laurel.

Among the messages of congratulations received by the Indian poet there was one of genuine respect and homage from the late Mr. E. S. Montagu, then Under-Secretary and afterwards Secretary of State for India. At the next distribution of honours Rabindranath received a knighthood. There may or may not be some connection between these two incidents, but it is a speculation of no interest. All that has to be noted is that the Government of the country displayed an interest in the poet on two occasions: first, when they threatened him as a purveyor of sedition and the next time when they conferred upon him a

knighthood in the wake of the Nobel Prize. This is not the end of the story, for there is a glorious sequel to it. When the Punjab lay prostrate under the iron heel of martial law, bruised, bleeding, outraged and martyred, the great patriot heart of Rabindranath went out in throbbing sympathy to his stricken countrymen in that Province, and he cast away from him, in indignant protest, the knighthood with which he had been honoured. The letter that he wrote to Lord Chelmsford on that occasion will remain a historical and human document of a lofty and dignified protest couched in language of singular force and eloquence. And his decision has been accepted without question throughout the world, for no one now thinks of addressing him as a knight. What an object-lesson for many of our countrymen who cling to their petty titles and blazon them on their door fronts! By surrendering his title Rabindranath flung down his gauntlet as a challenge to oppression and it was a deed more truly knightly than the breaking of a lance in a joust of arms.

At different times it has been the privilege of genius to disregard the conventions of social life and to live amidst picturesque, bizarre surroundings. But the blandishments of Bohemia have never had the slightest attraction for Rabindranath Tagore. In his hermitage of peace, surrounded by the young Brahmachari scholars of the Visvabharati, the teachers and learned men from distant lands, he has brought back the atmosphere of the open-air teaching of the ancient Aryans. At Bolpur he is revered and addressed as Gurudeva just as the Rishis and teachers of ancient

India were addressed by their disciples. To such of our countrymen as delight in the garb of the West and look upon England and Europe as the Mecca of their dreams, a visit to Bolpur may prove something of a shock. Time and again, the magnet of Rabindranath's personality has drawn famous and learned scholars of Europe to his academy. During their stay these learned pundits from the West discard the stiff and inelegant clothing of Europe for the graceful raiment of Bengal. But for the strange and humiliating obsession which is euphemistically called the cultural domination of Europe, no thought would have ever come to Indians of exchanging their own costumes for European clothing. There is so little imagination and such lack of individual choice in the West that practically all Europe and America have only a single kind of dress. Apart from climatic suitability, so far as western countries may be concerned, I can conceive of nothing more inartistic and uncomfortable than the clothes of Europe with their close fit, straight lines and sharp angles, making a man look like a rectangle set upon two straight lines. So great an authority as Thomas Alva Edison has condemned the garments of Europe and America without reserve on the ground that they cramp a man's movements and his life. On the other hand, most Indian costumes are full of grace, generously fashioned, giving free movement to the limbs, and falling in artistic curves and folds. There is no more attractive headdress anywhere than the turban of the Punjab, no upper garment so well-proportioned or so suggestive of dignity as the robe worn in Northern India, no costume so wholly beautiful as

that of Bengal, the *chadar* being an improvement on the Roman toga. I recollect two American ladies, cultured and widely travelled, whom I met in Calcutta, telling me that they had nowhere seen so graceful a costume as that worn by the Bengalis in Calcutta. If any one were to ask me to change my national garb for any other in order to meet another man or woman of a different nationality either in society or at the dinner table it would be an insult to my sense of self-respect and an affront to the ancient race from which I am proud to claim my descent. Rabindranath himself has written some spirited verses rebuking the penchant of some Indians for masquerading in European clothes. The robes that he wears when travelling in foreign lands are distinguished by originality and individuality. There is probably no Indian living who is in deeper sympathy with the intellect of Europe, or has better assimilated the finest literature of that continent, but he has not made the mistake of accepting the husk for the kernel of European culture.

Does the Nobel Prize afford an explanation of the wonderful reception accorded to Rabindranath Tagore in the West and the Far East? Rudyard Kipling, the much-belauded poet of the Empire, is also a Nobel prizewinner. If he were to undertake a tour of the world, would he be acclaimed in the same manner as the Indian poet? For Rabindranath the Nobel prize has served as an introduction to the West, but that is all. For the rest the Nobel prize has been of no more use to him than his cast-off knighthood. From continent to continent, country to country, capital to

capital he has passed as a vision of light, East and West rendering him the obeisance due to a world-teacher. It has been a royal progress and Rabindranath has moved like a king, ay, a king of hearts playing with wizard fingers upon the heartstrings of the nations. The great ones of the world have vied with one another in doing him all possible honour, learned and intellectual men have received him as a leader and elder brother, the Universities have opened wide their doors in scholastic welcome, men and women have jostled one another for a sight of this poet and prophet from the East. He has lectured to crowded audiences in English which was subsequently translated into the local language. He has recited his poems in the original Bengali to hushed houses which listened, without understanding the words, to the music of his voice. In China, the representative of the dethroned Manchu dynasty presented him with an imperial robe. Everywhere and in all lands he has been greeted and acclaimed with an enthusiasm and a reverence of which the world holds no parallel.

Since at the moment we are concerned more with the man than with the poet, it may be fittingly asked whether apart from his great gifts Rabindranath has any claim to greatness. The answer is, strip him of his God-given dower of song, even as he himself has laid aside his man-made title of distinction, take away from him the treasure of wisdom garnered during the years, and still he is great—great in his lofty character, great in the blameless purity of his life, great in his unquenchable love for the land of his birth, undeniably great in his deep and earnest religiousness and the

faith that rises as an incense to his Maker. As a mere man he is an exemplar whom his countrymen, in all reverence and all humility, may well endeavour to follow.

As a poet Rabindranath has won wider celebrity than any poet in his own lifetime. His works, or parts of them, are familiar to most readers in Europe, Asia and America. The best translations in English are by himself and these have been translated into other languages. Critics in Europe and America, almost without exception, have bestowed high praise on his writings and ranked him among the great poets of the world. Occasionally the criticism is shallow, specially when the Indian poet has been compared to some European poet. A comparison between two writers in two different languages may have the merit of suggestion, but it is not helpful to constructive criticism. A critic who undertakes such a comparison must satisfy his readers that he has read both writers in the original with full understanding. I doubt whether any European critic can make such an assertion in regard to the poetical writings of Rabindranath Tagore. An English admirer, who resided for some time in India, of the poet claims to have read him in the original Bengali and he considers the Indian writer in some respects superior to Victor Hugo. He has not, however, thought of comparing the poet to any English writer. If an Indian critic were to make such a comparison he should be asked whether he had read the works of Victor Hugo in the original French. The similarity between the French and the Indian writers is in their versatility and range of creative genius. Both are masters of prose and verse,

both are writers of prose fiction, both have written dramatic and lyrical poetry, both are child-lovers and have tendered the homage of exquisite song to the sovereignty of childhood. There the comparison ends and it can be carried no farther, because the two writers belong to two widely divergent schools. Tennyson rightly called Victor Hugo 'Stormy Voice of France.' The great French poet was 'Lord of human tears' but he was in his element in the *Sturm und Drang* of nature and human passions. 'French of the French,' he smote and withered Napoleon *Le Petit* with the flail and fire of his scorn and his burning philippics in prose and verse. He nicknamed Napoleon III the Little in contrast with Napoleon the Great. The muse of the Indian poet moves in the glory of early dawn and seeks the gathering shadows of evening. She finds her pleasure, not in the storm and stress but in the smiling beauties, of nature. She haunts the moonlight and strays in the ripe and waving corn. She listens to the voice of the sandal-scented wind from the south and knocks gently at the door of the human heart.

This comparison is in a measure helpful in that it suggests the range and limitations of these two poets and also indicates certain other features that may be profitably borne in mind. Industry is inseparable from genius but is not by itself a proof of original creative powers. Similarly, versatility may be a sign of brilliance but not necessarily of genius. There was a Spanish writer who wrote five hundred books and this is all that is remembered about him for his books have been forgotten. It is not by the quantity but the quality of their writings that the French and the

Bengali poets have become famous. The genius of Victor Hugo was not only dramatic but even melodramatic. He was a master of what Sir Walter Scott called 'the big bow-wow style.' Rabindranath in his later writings has touched spiritual heights seldom reached by any poet. When Rabindranath and Victor Hugo are named together we have to remember that there is music in the trickle of the rill and the flow of the spring and there is music also in the rush of the rapid and the thunder of the cataract.

In the case of a great poet or writer contemporary judgment may not always be in agreement with the ultimate verdict of posterity. A man standing close to the foot of a mountain cannot form a correct estimate of its height or its imposing position in the landscape. Similarly, a certain perspective of time is necessary for an accurate appreciation of a great original writer or creative genius. But the faculty of criticism has grown with the development of literature and we cannot expect the suspension of contemporary judgment in the case of any writer, great or small. That judgment as regards the Indian poet is entirely gratifying and will be endorsed by future generations of critics. Rich and varied as is the output of Rabindranath's literary work, he stands pre-eminent as a lyric poet. The world of readers outside his own province of Bengal knows him only through the medium of translations. Poetry divides itself easily into three main sections, epic, dramatic and lyric, the three clearly demarcated and separated by wide stretches of time and the evolution of the human intellect. Of these epic poetry is somewhat easy of translation,

because its essence is narrative. Some loss is unavoidable in translation but the outlines and central structure of an epic can be retained even in a new language. Drama is more difficult but the excellent renderings into English of the powerful Greek tragedies prove that the difficulties of translation are not insuperable. A fine lyrical poem is the despair of the translator. A great epic is fashioned in a titanic mould of which a cast may be taken. A drama is a panoramic view of human nature and may be copied. But a beautiful lyric is a sparkling little jewel of which every facet is carefully cut by the poet-jeweller and its setting is the language in which it is composed. Any duplication or imitation of such a gem may prove to be mere paste. To be fully appreciated a lyrical poem must be read in the original with due understanding of the language in which it is written. It is a compact and component whole from which no part can be separated from another. The words, the figures, the metre are all wedded together. Rabindranath has translated his poems as no one else could have done, but how is it possible to convey in another language the grace, the metrical arrangement and the musical harmony of the words of the original poems?

It can scarcely be expected that readers and admirers in far lands will learn the language of Bengal to read the works of the Bengali poet as originally written. India itself is a land of many languages and outside Bengal Indian readers have to read the English translations of the poet. I remember several years before Rabindranath received the Nobel Prize Gopal Krishna Gokhale, politician and mathematician, learned the Bengali language for the express purpose of

reading Rabindranath's poems in the original Bengali. Gokhale read out to me a few poems on one occasion, apologising for his inability to reproduce the Bengali accent and enunciation, and then asked me to read the same poems in the manner of a Bengali. However wide-flung his fame, Rabindranath's permanent place is in the literature of his own language. As a Bengali free from a few delusions, I recognise that Bengali literature does not rank as one of the great literatures of the world, though it is full of promise and has already produced a few writers of undoubted genius. Periods of literary activity have alternated with long spells of stagnation. There have been a very few critics of outstanding ability but critical acumen has not been systematically and conscientiously cultivated. The little criticism that is to be found is either shallow, or mordant, which passes for smartness, or indiscriminating and fulsome adulation. When Rabindranath was a young boy criticism by comparison was rampant in Bengal, and every writer of any note was compared to some English writer. Early Bengali literature was neglected, the Vaishnava poems of the era of Chaitanya, the cradle and crown of the lyrical poetry of Bengal, were consigned to the oblivion of cheap and obscure printing presses. The boy Rabindranath turned to this literature with the unerring instinct of nascent genius. As a boy-poet he wrote a number of charming poems in imitation of the language of Vidya-pati, a Maithil poet by birth and the language of his verse, but also a Bengali poet by adoption and extensive imitation during the period Bengali poetry was influenced by the personality of Chaitanya.

As the pinions of his genius grew stronger the poet soared higher and ranged wider. The supreme art of simplicity was his to begin with, and he rapidly acquired considerable depth of thought and a rare strength and delicacy of touch. There was very little variety in rhythm, metre and measure in Bengali poetry, though the great poet Michael Madhusudan Dutt had introduced blank verse and a few simple new metres. Rabindranath dazzled his readers by his creative faculty of introducing new metres and measures. Tripping verses nimble-footed as Terpsichore, slow, dreamy measures caught in the land of the lotus-eaters, long-swinging, stately lines of regal grace, stirring lays of knightly deeds and martyr heroes, lofty chants from ancient Aryan and Buddhist legendary lore, holy hymns rising like hosannas from the shrine of the soul, all were his and his muse answered every compelling call. His language is of classical purity and dignity, and of striking originality. Critics everywhere have been struck by his wealth of simile and metaphor, the subtlety of perception and suggestion, the realisation of the beautiful. His devotional songs and poems are among the finest in the whole range of literature. They are a noble and melodious expression of a living faith beautiful in its strength and sublime in its appeal. His lyrical poems are of steadily progressive strength and variety, and the careful student can detect the successive stages of development, the growing maturity of thought and expression, the increasing power over language and rhyme, and the splendid outburst of music in several of his later poems. Without

attempting anything like an exhaustive criticism or appreciation of the poet I may quote a single poem, which I have translated and which will be found in this book, displaying some of the qualities which have placed Rabindranath in the front rank of lyric poets. This poem was composed when the poet was about thirty-four years of age, in the full plenitude of his powers and the assured strength of his genius. The theme is *Urvashi*. The poem scintillates and glitters like the Kohinoor in the poet's Golconda of flawless jewels of the finest water :—

Nor mother, nor maid, nor bride art thou,
O beauteous Urvasi, dweller in the garden of the
 gods !
When Eve comes down on the mead drawing the
 golden end
Of her garment round her weary shape,
Thou dost not light the evening lamp in the corner of
 any home ;
With the faltering feet of doubt, trembling bosom,
 and downcast eyelids,
Smiling and coy, thou dost not pass to the bridal bed
In the still midnight.
Unveiled as the rise of the dawn
Unembarrassed art thou !
Like a flower without a stem blooming in itself
When didst thou blossom, Urvasi ?
Out of the churned sea thou didst rise in the primal
 spring-morn
With the chalice of ambrosia in thine right hand,
the poison cup in thy left ;

Like a serpent charm-stilled the mighty ocean
wave-tost
Sank at thy feet bending its million heaving hoods
In obeisance.
White as the jasmine flower, in beauty undraped,
the lord of the gods bowing before thee,
Passing fair art thou !
Wast thou never a budding maiden tender in years,
O Urvasi, of youth eterne ?
In the dark vault under the sea, sitting lone in
whose abode
Didst thou play with rubies and pearls the games
of childhood ?
In a chamber lit with jewelled lamps, to the cradle-
song of the sea,
With pure smiling face, on a couch of coral, in
whose arms
Didst thou sleep ?
Instant on thy awakening in the universe thou
wast fashioned with youth
Full flowered !
From eons and ages past thou art but the beloved
of the universe,
O Urvasi, of grace beyond compare !
Saints break their meditation to lay the merit of
their communion at thy feet,
Struck by the shaft of thy glance the three worlds
stir with youth ;
Borne is thy intoxicating fragrance by the blind
wind all ways,
Like a bee drunk with honey the poet enraptured
roams tempted of spirit

With impassioned song.

Thou passest with the tinkle of thy anklet,
fluttering the end of thy garment,
Swift as the lightning !

When thou dancest in the assembled hall of the
gods, exuberant with joy,

O swaying, billowy Urvasi,

To measured music dance the lined waves of the sea,
Shivering to the ears of corn trembles the skirt
of the earth ;

From the chainlet on thy breast bursts the star
that falls on the floor of the sky ;

Suddenly in the breast of man the mind loses itself,
The stream of blood dances in his veins.

On the distant horizon of a sudden snaps thy girdle,
O thou without restraint !

On heaven's mountain crest of sunrise thou art
Aurora embodied,

O Urvasi, the charmer of the world !

The slenderness of thy form is washed with the
tears of the world,

Painted is the pink of thy feet with the heart-
blood of the three worlds,

O thou with thy hair unbound, ungarmented ! on
the open lotus flower

Of the world's desire thou hast poised thy lotus feet
Ever so light !

In the whole heaven of the mind endless is thy
delight,

O companion of dreams !

Hark ! all around heaven and earth are crying for
thee

O cruel, heedless Urvasi!

Will the ancient and pristine of cycles come back
to the earth,
From the fathomless, shoreless sea, wet-tressed,
wilt thou rise again?

First will that form appear in that first morn,
All thy limbs will weep hurt by the eyes of the un-
iverse,

Dripping the water from thy loveliness.

On a sudden the great ocean will heave and roll
To a song unsung before.

Never again, never again! That moon of glory has
set,

On the mount of the sunset dwells Urvasi.

So on the earth today in the burst of joy of the
spring

Whose long-drawn sigh of parting eternal comes
mingled with the notes of mirth?

On the night of the full moon when all around is
full laughter

Whence come the tunes distraught of the lute of
distant memory?

The tears flow in flood.

Still hope keeps awake in the weeping of the heart,

O thou without bonds!

Urvasi is an epithet of the dawn personified as an *apsara* a heavenly nymph, the principal danseuse in Indra's heaven. The Aryan, Greek, Roman and Islamic conceptions of paradise are a perpetuation of the lower forms of the pleasures of life on earth.

The paradise of the North American Indian is the happy hunting ground, for he cannot think of a heaven without the pleasures of the chase. Incidents relating to Urvasi are frequently mentioned in ancient Sanskrit books. According to our poet among the objects and beings that rose from the sea when it was churned by the gods and the demons with the mount Mandar for a churning rod and the great serpent Vasuki for a churning rope Urvasi was one. We need not pause to enquire whether this conception of the poet is strictly accurate according to the mythological legend. I accept it for the purpose of my observations. This splendid allegory crystallises some dim and remote tradition about some stupendous convulsion of nature, may be an unparalleled seismic disturbance, a mighty volcanic eruption, the emergence of a vast tract of land from the sea or the submergence of some forgotten continent like Atlantis. In Greek mythology, which is largely a reflex of Aryan mythology, Aphrodite, named Venus in Roman mythology, rose from the sea-foam in which she was born. The Sanskrit legend explains how the sea was churned into foam by a titanic process. Aphrodite unlike Urvasi does not represent the dawn, but the Greek word for daybreak, *eos*, is etymologically very similar to the Sanskrit word for dawn, *usha*.

In all the ancient accounts relating to Urvasi there is nothing that appeals to the finer feelings. There is the fascination, irresistible to saint and sinner alike, of an unearthly and fadeless beauty. In the tenth *mandalam* of the Rig Veda there is a dialogue between Pururava and Urvasi, the sun and the

dawn. The story is told in fuller detail in the Satapatha Brahmana, the Bhagavata and is mentioned in several other books. In the Ramayana it is written that all the *apsaras*, among whom Urvasi is one, rose from the sea when it was churned. The legend that she issued from the thigh of Narayana is mentioned in a *purana* later than these books. In the Mahabharata the third Pandava, Arjuna, who rejected Urvasi's advances, was cursed by her. For a short spell she was the wife of King Pururava and in dramatising this incident in *Vikramorvasi* the poet Kalidasa represents her as a loving and attractive woman. But the modern poet has restored Urvasi to the spirit world and interpreted her with an inspiration so sympathetic and elevating as to reveal her in a new light. As one reads and understands this poem, he realises the sublimation of Urvasi from the low level of sense to the height of supersense. She no longer appears merely as the radiant but heartless ravisher of hearts, a much-magnified, if elusive, type of the scarlet woman. Any conception of the eternal feminine, whether in the flesh or in the spirit, is incomplete without the three stages of maidenhood, wifedom and motherhood, and this is the first note sounded by the poet while apostrophising Urvasi. Fronting the universe unshrinking in the freshness and glory of the first dawn of creation, Urvasi stands in the splendour of her beauty with the glint of the young sunlight on her loveliness.

And this image recalls the legend of her first manifestation, for there is no word about her birth anywhere though the parentage of the gods can be

easily traced in the elaborate theogony of Sanskrit sacred literature, with its imposing setting. Behold the gods and their opponents with their muscles showing like corded steel, heaving and straining and pulling at either end of the straightened but writhing coils of the mightiest of serpents, trampling the golden strand under their giant feet, the massive bulk of mount Mandar whirling each way by turn with the broad, speckled bands of the length of the serpent Ananta enfolding its girth, the cosmic ocean lashed and racked and churned into hissing, hydra-headed foam! And behind this travail and turmoil is the background of the calm and smiling rose-flush of the dawn! On this scene of mingled strife and peace appears Urvasi, parting the waters and the foam, her hair dripping and clinging to the rounded curves and the slender lines of her peerless form, the vision of her beauty striking the godly and ungodly beholders dumb with amazement!

For centuries poets and dramatists and other writers accepted this conception of Urvasi without question. There was no suggestion of any flaw in the myth, or anything lacking in the imagination that invested the nymph with perennial youth. But the latest of the great poets of India has noted the gap in the life-story of Urvasi. We see her suddenly revealed to the astonished eyes of the universe in the maturity of her lissome grace, the immortal gift of her beauty and her fatal fascination, but nothing is known of the innocence of her early youth, of her playfulness as a child or the arms that rocked her to sleep in a gilded chamber in some submarine palace. And hence the

wondering question of the poet concerning the missing infancy of Urvasi. The original legend is undoubtedly a daring figment revelling in the creation of full-grown beauty, skipping the stages between childhood and maturity. In Judaic tradition and the Book of Genesis the first man and woman were never infants. But the loss to the being or the spirit so created is immeasurable. What beauty of person or consciousness of strength can compensate for the void inseparable from the absence of the lights and shadows of the vista of memory, recollections of the past to fill moments of idleness or preoccupation?

This is the emphasis on the word 'only' (*sudhoo*) when the poet says Urvasi has been for ages the beloved of the whole universe. Her appeal is the disturbing influence of beauty alone without the lighter shades of the memory of an innocent childhood. It is the puissance of sheer beauty shattering the concentrated contemplation of the saint and filling all the worlds with the ache of youth and maddening the fancy of the poet. But she, the creator of all this commotion, the dancer with the jingling anklets making music to her footfall, flits as she will, gay, heartwhole, fancy-free. It is when she dances before the assembled gods on the sapphire floor of the ball-room in Indra's palace with all the abandon and witchery of her art that the poet lifts the veil from the mystery of her identity and reveals her as the spirit of beauty behind the phenomena of nature. The rhythmic waves of the sea keep measure to her dancing feet, the tremors of the agitated earth are communicated to the heads of corn, the heart of man is

strangely and inexplicably disturbed. The falling meteor is a jewel burst from the chain round Urvasi's neck in the mad whirl of her dance, the lambent lightning with its wavy lines is the broken strand of the lustrous girdle round her waist. Urvasi is the expression of all the buoyant, spontaneous joyance of Nature!

Still further behind is the Vedic myth, though even there the identity of Urvasi with the Morning Dawn and the Evening Twilight is very faint and the allegory is more or less lost in the proper name. In hailing her as the embodiment of dawn in heaven the poet greets her on the threshold of early tradition and yet finds in her the fulfilment of the later and wilder myths cleansed from the grosser accretions of later times. The morning dew in which the dawn is bathed represents the tears of the world while the tinge of rose with which the delicate feet of Urvasi are painted by the rays of the morning sun is the heart-blood of all the worlds. As the lotus which remains closed at night opens its heart to the first touch of the sun, so the longing and the desire of the universe opens out as a lotus flower on which the dainty sun-kissed feet of Urvasi may rest. The image of beauty that haunts the dreams of the world is the all-pervading loveliness of Urvasi.

Will the revolving cycles bring back the ancient and pristine era when Urvasi rose from the sea which hailed her with a new song of welcome? Will a wondering world again witness what the gods saw? Will the wailing cry of heaven and earth reach Urvasi and turn her tripping feet back to the scene of her

first triumphs? Vain, alas, is the weeping and yearning for the lost Urvasi! How can the beauty and the glory of the first dawn of creation ever return? Is it not recorded in the Rig Veda* that Urvasi told Pururava, "I have gone from thee like the first of Mornings. . . . I, like the wind, am difficult to capture?" Urvasi is 'not the nymph of the daily recurrent dawn. She 'came from the waters flashing brilliant as the falling lightning, bringing delicious presents for Pururava.'† This bears out the view that Urvasi first appeared from the sea. Gone is she with the glory of the first of Mornings, leaving behind her the memory of a vanished beauty such as has never again been seen on earth or in heaven, and her parting sigh comes floating in the festive season of springtide as an undernote of melancholy!

And so we see Urvasi again, ancient as the Vedas in recorded language and far more ancient in mythic tradition, uplifted and purified, stepping forth as she did when she rent the veil of uncreated, brooding gloom and looked out on the universe in the soft dawnlight, wondering and wondered at, passing fair, winning unsought the adoration of immortals and mortals. The fame of the poet, to whose genius we owe this new presentation of the world-old Urvasi, has been broadcast round the world by the wireless of human appreciation conveyed in many tongues, and if we claim him as our own it is with the knowledge that he belongs also to the world and his is the one form of wealth which grows with the

* Rig Veda, X, 95.

† Ibid.

giving. Let ours be the portion of sharing the glad gratefulness of giving, of adding to the joy and light of the world.

Hagenchranath Gupta

India

India, thou hast taught kings to lay down
Crown, sceptre, throne and kingdom,
And to put on the clothing of the poor.
Thou hast taught warriors in lawful battle
To forgive an enemy times out of number,
To hold back the drawn arrow, forgetful
Of victory and defeat; thou hast taught the doer
To surrender to God all triumph of achievement.
Thou hast taught the householder to enlarge
the home
To neighbour, friend, guest and the orphan.
Luxury hast thou bound with restraint;
Poverty hast thou brightened with pure

Distaste for the world; wealth hast thou
Blessed spent on doing good; thou hast taught
Men to set self aside and in weal and woe
To set the world down before the Lord.



To the Sons of India

Before the glance of the West with its
Pride of power, its traders rolling in luxury,
And its pomp of wealth, do not,
O sons of Bharat, feel ashamed to wear
Your plain white garb and to live
Your simple life with mien noble and calm.
Listen not to what they say, keep your priceless
treasure
In your heart, let it rest
On your smooth brow as an invisible crown.
That which looks large and has been heaped high,
Let it not overwhelm you, and do not
Prostrate yourselves before it.

Place your free soul on the throne
Of poverty, filling your mind
With the leisure of want.



The Forest Hermitage

When I behold ancient Ind in the mind's eye—
East and west, north and south
Range vast primal forests with wide-reaching
shades.
The king, leaving the pride of kingdom
in his capital,
Dismounting from his chariot at a distance,
Comes with bowed head to seek the master's rede.
On the riverside is seated the great Rishi
In meditation; apart under the trees
In the quiet morning air the young scholars
Pore o'er their studies; the maidens,
Clothing their delicate youth with rough
Barks of trees, water the plants of the hermitage.

At the sylvan entrance comes the king,
Silver-haired, relinquishing his throne
And his crown; with the lofty light
Of renunciation on his tranquil brow.



To Nature

Thou tanglest my heart in a hundred nooses of
love,

What is this thy play?

It is but a little feeble life—

Why so many bonds to bind it?

At every turn and every moment

Thou winnest my love with thy wiles,

But hast none to give, thou stealer of hearts!

I wander about in search of thy heart,

O cruel Nature;

So many flowers, such light, such songs and scents,

But where is love?

Hidden in the wealth of thy beauty thou laughest

While we weep.

—SEVEN—

Day and night in the deserted playfield

Thou playest in jest ;

We wot not whom thou lovest or slightest ;

He to whom thou art kind and loving in the
morning,

The evening finds him lying neglected in the dust.

Still I love thee and cannot forget,

Thou enchantress !

Thy loveless embrace awakes in the heart

A thousand songs ;

In happiness and grief and misery I live in the
sunlight,

Nor crave the frozen stillness of the endless night.

Half open, half-veiled, thy face

Is the abode of mystery ;

To the heart it brings the ache of love

Mingled with fear ;

Thy ever-new phases pass understanding,

And the heart is filled with laughter and tears.

Stretching forth my heart and soul I rush
towards thee,

But thou eludest my grasp;

I see the slight, sweet, mocking smile

On thy sun-red lips;

If I wish to flee thou spreadest thy nets for my
feet,—

What arts, what strength, fleet-footed, quick of
tongue

Thou knowest not thy own limits,

Thine own mystery;

So in the blind night when the seven worlds

Are steeped in slumber,

Curious and silent-footed thou standest in the sky

Lighting million torches of star-rays.

In another place thou sittest ever lone

With a vow of eternal silence,

All around is the hard, treeless, dreary

Solitude of the desert;

Eon after eon rise overhead the sun and the moon,
They look and they pass without a word.

Again, thou rompest and playest like a girl
 With hair and garments flying in the wind,
With laughter overflowing as a fountain,
 Without a trace of shame;
Thy heart cannot hold its own measure,—
Words and songs without end.

Yet again with wrath-lit frenzied eyes,
 Slaying in a moment,
Thou strikest the breast of hapless Earth
 With incessant curses of fire;
Sometimes in the dusk moved by a noble grief
A pale shadow as of pity falls on thy face.

It is thus thou hast conquered
 Innumerable hearts;

For ages and ages thy countenance

Has been fresh and sweet;

Disguised in many forms thou art near all,

Yet hast thou given thyself to none.

The more am I baffled the more I remember

The great opulence of thy beauty ;

So grows my love as increases my pain,

As I laugh and cry ;

The farther thou goest the heavier is my
soul trammelled,

The less I understand thee the more I love thee.





Manifestation

1

In some long ago month of May
I waited for you;
You have come in the thick of rain.
Today in swelling, stormy measure,
Today in the thunder of dense new clouds
Finish the song you wish to play
In the depth of my soul,
In the flood of rain.

2

From a distance I saw another day
Your golden veil,
Your ornaments of new *champa* flowers.

When you come near I see
Your thick, deep, new veil;
In the startled flash of the flitting lightning
Move your feet.

Where are the ornaments of *champa* !

3

Ah, that day as I saw you,
You touched the woodland as you passed,
And the flowers bent before you.
Methought I heard the gentle tinkling
Of the belled band round your slender waist.
On the shaded path as I passed
Methought I felt the fragrance of your scented
breath,
As you touched the woodland on your way.

4

Today you come filling the world,
Spreading your loosened tresses in the sky,
Winding the wild flowers round your feet.

You have shrouded me in your shade,
In your dense, dank, vast mystery;
With your verdant splendour you have
Filled the strand of the sea of my heart,
With the wild flowers round your feet.

5

The wreaths of flowers that I strung in May
Are not fitting gifts for you;
As you pass, the chants of your praise, self-lifted,
Follow your steps in pæans of thunder.
This little lyre, with its feeble string,
Cannot sound that epic measure,
My gift is not worthy of you.



The Dew-drop

Weeping, wails the dew-drop,
' Why is my life so little a thing,
' Like a child's fancy
' That passes the moment it is born ?
' A happy tear-drop
' Of the fresh-waked damsel of the Dawn,
' The tear is dried
With the passing of her smile.
With her glorious red lips
' The rose smiles happily ;
' The *bakul* gives the nectar of her life
' And intoxicates the wind ;
' The butterfly does not know
' Whom its heart desires,

‘ Lifting its lazy wings

‘ It flits from flower to flower.

‘ Why cannot I live

‘ In the midst of this laughter?

‘ As I open my eyes

‘ Like a moment of bliss—

‘ With the unspent smile on my lips

‘ Why do I droop and die?’

Lying on the fresh green leaf

The dying dew-drop cries,

‘ Alas, who has known no happiness,

‘ Why comes to him life’s surcease?’

‘ Why was I not a dew-drop?’

Says the poet with a sigh ;

‘ In the morning I would have opened my
eyes,

‘ With the morning I would have faded away.


‘ O God ! thou hast made my life

‘Like that of the dew-drop;

‘Why hast thou not given me

‘The dew-drop’s death?’





Fancy

I have sown but dreams

In the wind,

And I have gleaned flowers of the sky

In despair.

Like a shadow fades the world,

The barge of hope never reaches the shore,

The image wrought by the mind

Floats in the sky.

How have I played with the flame of fire,

At the day's end I found it was all ashes!

Dreams only have I sown

In the wind.

The Making of Songs

It is a mere idle *maya*, the play of clouds,
Casting away the mind's desire to the winds.
It is merely the weaving and snapping of wreaths,
A moment's laughter and cry ending in a song.
All day long with the sunshine on the green leaves
The flowers with their own shadows play ;
This is also playing with shadows in the
summer wind.
Losing my way wittingly in the land of wizardry
I wander thoughtlessly about the livelong day ;
Anywhere I gather flowers to give to some one,
In the evening they droop and are scattered
in the wood.
Absent-minded I sing, some one hears or not hears,
Some one may remember, some one may draw
nigh.



To the Muse

Hither, where the clouds play around,
The wind kisses as it comes,
And the boundless sky draws to its heart
Opening out both arms,
I call thee, come, my beloved Muse!

In the midst of this infinite sky
I have built thee a place, my Muse;
Mingling with the clouds, swaying with the wind
Come down to my side with a smiling face;
Clinging one to another
The baby clouds will stand around thee,
Wordless with wonder.

Come lightly down from the clouds,
Come and sit on my left
As the Dawn with two golden fingers
Gently parting the darkness descends!
Come from the wind, my Muse,
Come and sit by my side,
As from somewhere in the wood
Floating on the stream of the wind
Comes the scent of flowers.

From the inner chamber of my heart
Come slowly, slowly, my Bride,
As the timid lover rises slowly
Holding the trembling heart,
And falls fainting at the feet of the loved one.


Or, come and sit by me
With all thy limbs relaxed
Even as on the bed of snow
With kisses pressed on the closed eyelids

Death comes
As the dew drop falls ;
As the star passes
To the dark sea of the west ;
With slow, faint smile,
The line of vermilion in her hair
As the day comes to die
On her husband's funeral pyre,
In the glowing flame of the west.



A Woman's Feet

Two footfalls upon the breast of the earth,
Two lazy, rosy, tender feet!
To the earth comes the memory of a hundred
springs,
The dream of the touch of countless flowers;
The blooming red flowers of a hundred springs
Have fallen and mingled with two pink feet;
The light of the rising and the waning sun
Has set in the shadow of these two feet.
They strew the roadside with the songs of youth,
And the anklets sob as they cling to them,
And dancing is prisoned by a sweet charm.
The earth is cruel and the ground is dry
and hard,—
Come, oh, come to my heart where droops
The red lotus of shame-crimsoned desire.



Undraped

Cast aside your garment, remove the veil,
Wear only beauty's naked ornament!
Behold, the maidens of the gods
Wear fabrics woven from sun and star-beams!
The filled out outlines—the lotus full blown—
The mingling of life and youth and loveliness—
You stand apart and alone in this wonderful world!
The moon-beams will fall on all your limbs,
And the south breeze will play round your shape;
Merge in the firmament's boundless blue
Like Nature, star-spangled and nude !
Shamed by the glory of your beauty uncovered
Cupid will hide his face in his mantle.
Let the clear Dawn come to the homes of men,
Purity unashamed, O white nude one !

The First Kiss

The sky became silent with lowered eyes,
The birds ceased their multiple songs;
The wind became mute; the music of
 flowing water
Ceased in a moment; the murmur of the forest
Died slowly in the forest's heart.
On the waveless river's deserted shore,
In the shades of evening silently descended
The rim of the sky on the speechless earth.
At that moment in the silent and solitary balcony
We first kissed each other.
In that self-same moment, far and near
Rang the peal of bells and conchshells were blown
In the temples of the gods calling to worship.
A tremor ran through the infinite star-world
And our eyes filled with tears.



The Strange Lady

I know you, I know you,

O lady from a strange land !

You live over across the sea,

O lady from a foreign land !

I have seen you in the autumn morn,

I have seen you in the summer night,

I have seen you in my heart,

O lady from a strange land !

Laying my ear to the sky

I have heard, oh, I have heard your song,

I have yielded to you my heart,

O lady from a strange land !

After roaming over the world I have come
to a new land,

I am a guest at your door,

O lady from a strange land !

Many Moods

Laughing you fall like a wave

On my heart;

On the sea of youth in the full moon

Hath come the floodtide;

Round the mad splashing waters

Keeping time with your dancing feet,

What is this your sport on my solitary shore?

Filling my whole heart you dance and sing,

And you come anear and go afar

Times without number.

You laugh and you fall like a wave

On my breast.

Like awakening you kiss my brow

And rise before my eyes ;

On the other shore of sleep slowly you appear

In the new light ;

And you come and fill my heart

As you stand with wild hair and rosy feet ;

The heavens break and you fill them,

And all the gardens in life and youth

Are filled with flowers.

You kiss my brow like awakening

While you rise before my eyes.

Sighing like a flower you droop and fall

On my breast ;

As hidden dew drops fall your tears

And wet my heart.

Silent masses of perfume enter my being

Revealing dreams of happiness in my silent soul.

The delight of touch brings the drowsiness
Of sleep to mine eyes,
Your kisses move all over my limbs.
Drooping and sighing like a flower
You fall upon my breast.





The Mistake

Whom you have sent away in tears,
On what pretence will you recall him now?
In the summer air tonight,
In the grove of flowers,
You think of him standing under the *bakul* tree.
With what wile can you recall him now?

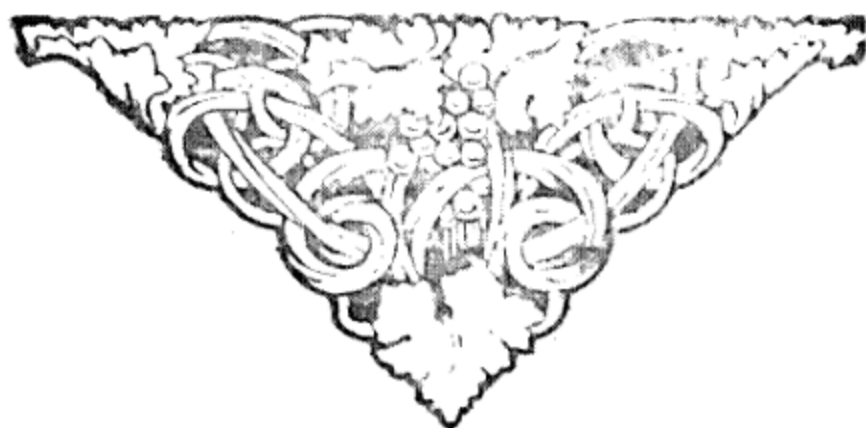
That other summer night
Had mingled with the soul,
And all around were the flowers in bloom;
If only there had been whispered words of love,
If you had placed the garland round his neck !
What wile will recall him now?

The summer night of the full moon
Comes round again and again,
But he who hath gone away
Cometh not again.

Auspicious was the hour, the error was a moment's,
Alas, the heart is athirst and aflame!
What wile will bring him back to you?



Between you and me there is one river,
She sings ever the same song to both banks.
I listen lying on the solitary sand,
You listen setting down your pitcher on the bank.
You put one meaning on the song of the river,
Another meaning comes to my ear on my bank





Playing with the Heart

What game wilt thou play with my heart,
O beloved of my soul?
My heart hath floated down
To the shore at thy feet,
Take it and look at it.
It is not a bunch of grass,
Or flowers that have floated downstream;
What game wilt thou play with my heart,
O beloved of my soul?

You and I

You fill my thoughts
Day after day;
I greet you in the solitude
Out of the world;
You have taken possession
Of my life and death.

Like the sun at sunrise
My soul gazes at you
As a single eye.
You are like the lofty sky,
I am like the boundless sea
With the full moonlight flooding between;
You are ever at peace,
I am restless for ever,
Yet in the distant horizon
We ever meet.



Entreaty

When you are alone, my love,
Write lovingly and carefully my name
In the temple of your memory;
Teach the measure of the song
That sings in my soul
To the anklets round your feet.

There is my talking bird, take him
And pet him with loving words
And keep him in your mansion-yard.
Remember in a love-knot to tie
The coloured thread round my wrist
To your own bracelet of gold.

Pluck a flower from my garden
And place it carelessly
In the plaits of your hair;
Let my memory be the vermilion
Of happy augury and place it
Beside the sandal mark on your forehead.

Take the aroma of the passion of my heart
And mingle it and keep it
With the fragrance of your limbs;
Snatch away and plunder
My troubled life and death
In your peerless splendour.

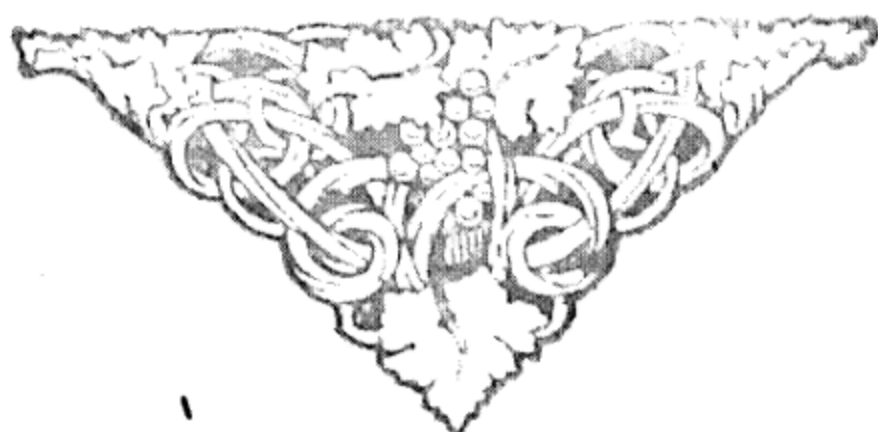




The Call

Come, come back, my love, come back!
My heart is hungry, thirsty, sore,
Come back, my love;
O cruel, come; come, my pitiful, gentle one;
Fair and cool as a rain-cloud, come;
Come, my constant joy,
Come, my endless sorrow,
Vanquisher of all my joys and sorrows,
Come to my heart!
Come, my long-desired, my heart's treasure,
O fickle, O faithful,
Come back to my arms.
Come back to my breast,
Come back to my eyes

Come in my sleep, my dreams,
My ornaments, in all my world.
Come in the laughter on my lips,
The tears in my eyes;
In my dalliance, my wiles,
In my sulks, come!
Come in all my memory,
In all my forgetfulness;
In my worship and my work,
In my love and coyness,
In life and in death, come!



The Awakening

In the bower of my youth sings a bird,

‘ Wake, maiden, wake,

‘ Open thy love-lazed eyes,

‘ Wake, maiden, wake!

‘ On this restless night

‘ Wake to the April song,

‘ O thou afeard of first love!’

In my garden where the birds roam

Incessantly cries the cuckoo,

‘ Wake, maiden, wake,

‘ Wake in the new pride of youth,

‘ In the new scent of flowers,

‘ The faint breath of the south wind,

‘ Wake in solitary loneliness;

‘ Wake in the disarray of flowers,
‘ Wake in gently trembling shame!’
Hark, on the couch of my breast,
Again and again within my heart,
Comes the sweet call of the lute,
‘ Wake, maiden, wake!’



In the Village

I feel her close to me here!

As close as the earth,

Close as the flowers and the fruits,

Close as air and water.

I love her even as the song of the bird,

The musical flow of water,

The softness all around,

The verdure of the woodland.

She is beautiful as the evening,

As the tuberose at night,

Like the morning star at the edge of the sky,


As the pure dew-washed dawn.

She is my own like the rain,
Like the blue vault of heaven,
Like sleep at night,
Like the running water of a river,

And the grateful shadow of a tree.
My song is as simple
As the tears that flow from the eyes.

As life fills the heart
So endures her love.





The Aimless Voyage

How far will you take me,
O beautiful one,
On what shore will you anchor
Your golden bark?
Whenever I question you,
O lady from a foreign land,
You merely smile and lift your finger
And silently point to the west,
Toward the setting sun
And the tempestuous sea.
What is there and on what quest
Are we voyaging?
Tell me, I ask you,
O unknown,

Lo ! where flames on the sunset shore
The day's funeral pyre,
The water glows like liquid fire,
And the sky melts like the tears
Of the nymphs of heaven,
Is that where you dwell—
Beyond the wave-swept sea
At the foot of the cloud-kissed mountains ?
You look at me and you smile,
And you never speak a word.

The wind it ever sweeps
In long-drawn sighs,
Blindly booms the sea ;
Nowhere rises the shore
Beyond the deep blue waters.
It seems like the swinging
Of an endless weeping
Flooding the earth

Whereon rides the golden barge
And the evening light falls.
Sitting in the midst of it all
You smile silently.

When you first called,
'Who will come with me?'
I looked once at your eyes
In the fresh dawn;
You stretched out your hand
To the boundless sea of the west
Where the flickering light like hope
Trembled on the waters.
I asked you as I entered the boat,
'Is there a new life,
'Does the dream of hope grow there
'As a golden fruit?'
You merely smiled in my face
Without a word.

Since then the sun has shone
And clouds have passed ;
The sea has broken in waves
And become calm again.
The day has passed
And the breeze has filled the sail.
Where goes the ship of gold ?
The sun is setting in the west.
Now I ask you again,
' Is there balmy death,
' Is there peace, is there sleep
' Down below the dark ?'
You raise your eyes and you smile
Without a word on your lips.

Anon will come the black night
Spreading its wings ;
Shrouded will be the golden light
In the evening sky ;
Only the fragrance of your person

Will be floating around;
Only the lapping of the waters
Will come to the ears,
And the wind will sweep your loose hair
Over my limbs.
Distracted I shall call out to you,
' Come close and lay your touch
 upon me.'
You will not speak and I shall not see
Your silent smile.





The Past

Speak, oh speak,
O Past that never had a beginning !
The ages pour their tales
Into your fathomless sea ;
In your waters mingle
The streams of many lives,
There all currents are still;
The babble of voices is hushed
In your waveless, awful silence.

I have heard your footsteps

In my heart,

The garnered stories of many days

You leave in my soul.

O Past, secretly you work

In the many worlds;

Amidst the frivolous chatter of the present

You abide in your calm.

O Past, secretly in my heart

Speak, oh speak!

Never have you lost a word,

You keep them all;

On every page of life

In invisible letters

You write the story

Of our ancient race.

Others have forgotten,

But you never forget;

All forgotten silent records,

You hold them all.

Give them voice, O Past, O silent Hermit,

Speak, oh speak!

After the Burning of Cupid¹

What have you done, Sanyasin ?²

All over the universe you have

Scattered the ashes of Cupid !

The breath of his agony

Mingles with the sigh of the wind,

And his tears are flowing from the sky.

Rati, his consort, is filling the world

With the notes of her lamentation,

And a wail of woe rises from all sides.

In March obedient to an unknown bidding

The world shivers and faints.

What is this anguish that sounds

Exultant in the harp of the heart?

¹ According to Indian mythology Madan (Cupid) tried to disturb the meditation of the god Siva and was burned to ashes by the flame that shot out from the angry eye of the god.

² Siva.

What are the voices that the maiden hears

In earth and heaven?

What words are murmured by young leaves,

What language is hummed by the black bee?

Of what lover thinks the sunflower with face
upturned

What desire is borne by the flowing stream?

Whose mantle do I see trailing

In the moonlight?

Whose eye in the silent blue sky?

Whose face is seen veiled in light?

Whose footprint on the soft grass-bed?

In the scent of flowers whose touch,

Ravishing heart and soul, clings

Round the heart like the tendrils of a creeper?

O Sanyasin, the ashes of burnt Cupid

Have been scattered over the universe!




The Goddess of Autumn

We have tied a bunch of white reed flowers,
We have woven a wreath of *sephali* blossoms;
We have filled the tray
With ears of new corn.
Come, goddess of autumn, on
Thy chariot of white cloud,
Come along the broad, blue road
On the new washed green hills
Glittering in the sunlight.
Come wearing the white lotus sprinkled
With cool drops of dew in thy crown.
In the quiet grove on the bank of the full Ganges
The swan is waiting to spread
Its wings at thy feet.

Strike soft thy gold harp, and glad notes
Will mingle with a touch of sadness;
Take the magic jewel in thy hair
And touch our thoughts,
And all care will turn into gold,
And darkness will become light!





The Abdication

Lo, of her golden ornaments
Vesper has denuded herself ;
Behold, yonder trailing her wild tresses
In the sky, filling her hands
With flowers of stars, she has filled
The darkness with her worship.

Her weariness she has put aside
In the nests of birds ;
In the depth of the forest, hidden in her breast,
Lighted by the jewelled glow-worm, oft hath she
Turned the rosary of peace in prayer.

Lo, the hidden scent of her flowers
Hath in secret sighed ;

List, the deep utterance of her soul,
Borne by the peaceful wind, has laid
Silently down its pain.

Behold, her eyes under her veil
Are overflowing with tears of dew ;
Behold, the treasure of her radiant beauty
Is surrendered in a final obeisance
To the formless darkness.





The Coming of Krishna

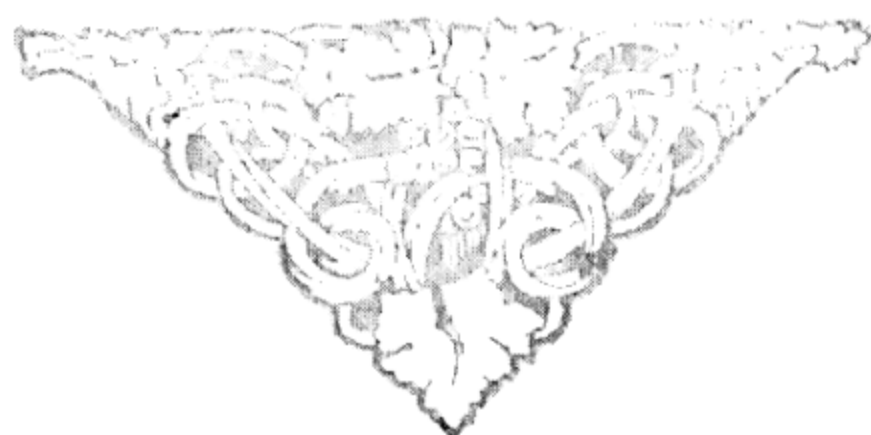
Behold, Radhika, my friend,
Lo, through the wooded path
Softly cometh Syam ¹
Softly singing a song.

Quickly put the garland round thy neck,
Put on thy blue bodice ;
O fair one, colour the parting in thy hair
With red vermilion.

Friend, fill the room with light,
Light the golden lamp ;
Pour out the scented water
And fill the bower with fragrance.

¹ A name of Krishna with the same meaning, dark-complexioned.

O girl, pluck the jasmine,
Pluck the white scented flowers
And weave a wreath for him who cometh.
With eyes athirst gazes Bhanu Singh
Along the path of the bower,
For softly cometh Syam
Singing softly a snatch of song.





*Death*¹

O Death, like my Syam art thou!

Cloud-like is thy complexion,

Clouds are thy tangled hair ;

Red are thy lotus hands,

Red are thy lips.

Grief-healing is thy pitiful embrace,

Death bestows deathlessness ;

Thou art like my Syam !

O Death, Syam is thy name !

When cruel Madhava² forgets me for aye

Never wilt thou forget me.

¹ This and the poem preceding it were composed in the poet's boyhood in the language and after the manner of Vidyapati Thakur, the poet of Mithila, whose songs have found a permanent place in the literature of Bengal and have been extensively imitated.

² A name of Krishna.

Thou callest me on thy lute from afar,
Thou callest me ever by name,
' Radha, Radha, Radha !'

Clouds overcast the sky,
The world is plunged in darkness;
Silent are the frightened trees,
Fearful is the deserted path.

Alone shall I go
To the assignation with thee ;
What fear hath she whose lover art thou ?
Fear and obstacles will take a friendly shape
And show me the path.

Says Bhanu ¹ Singh, ' Fie, fie, Radha,
' Fickle is thine heart !
' Madhava my lord is dearer than Death,
' Judge now for thyself. '

¹ A synonym for Rabi (the sun), the name of the youthful poet.



*Urvasi*¹

Nor mother, nor maid, nor bride art thou,
O beauteous Urvasi, dweller in the garden
of the gods !
When Eve comes down on the mead drawing
the golden end
Of her garment round her weary shape,
Thou dost not light the evening lamp
in the corner of any home ;
With the faltering feet of doubt, trembling bosom,
and downcast eyelids,

¹ Urvasi was the principal dancer in Indra's heaven. In the Rig-Veda it is not mentioned how Urvasi came into existence. According to a later myth she issued out of the thigh of a Rishi called Narayana. The poet here conceives her emerging from the cosmic ocean when it was churned by the gods and demons.

Smiling and coy, thou dost not pass to the
bridal bed
 In the still midnight.

Unveiled as the rise of the dawn
Unembarrassed art thou !

Like a flower without a stem blooming in itself
When didst thou blossom, Urvasi ?

Out of the churned sea thou didst rise
in the primal spring-morn

With the chalice of ambrosia in thine right hand,
the poison cup in thy left ;

Like a serpent charm-stilled the mighty ocean
wave-tost

Sank at thy feet bending its million heaving hoods
In obeisance.

White as the jasmine in beauty undraped, the
lord of the gods bowing before thee

Passing fair art thou !

Wast thou never a budding maiden tender
in years,

O Urvasi, of youth eterne ?

In the dark vault under the sea, sitting lone
in whose abode
Didst thou play with rubies and pearls the games
of childhood ?
In a chamber lit with jewelled lamps,
to the cradle-song of the sea,
With pure smiling face, on a couch of coral,
in whose arms
Didst thou sleep ?
Instant on thy awakening in the universe
thou wast fashioned with youth
Full flowered !
From eons and ages past thou art but the beloved
of the universe,
O Urvasi, of grace beyond compare !
Saints break their meditation to lay the merit
of their communion at thy feet
Struck by the shaft of thy glance the three worlds
stir with youth ;
Borne is thy intoxicating fragrance by the blind
wind all ways,

Like a bee drunk with honey the poet enraptured
roams tempted of spirit

With impassioned song.

Thou passest with the tinkle of thy anklet,
fluttering the end of thy garment

Swift as the lightning !

When thou dancest in the assembled hall
of the gods, exuberant with joy

O swaying, billowy Urvasi !

To measured music dance the lined waves
of the sea,

Shivering to the ears of corn trembles the skirt
of the earth ;

From the chainlet on thy breast bursts the star
that falls on the floor of the sky ;

Suddenly in the breast of man the mind
loses itself,

The stream of blood dances in his veins.

On the distant horizon of a sudden snaps
thy girdle,

O thou without restraint !

On heaven's mountain crest of sunrise thou art
Aurora embodied,

O Urvasi, the charmer of the world !

The slenderness of thy form is washed with
the tears of the world,

Painted is the pink of thy feet with the heart-
blood of the three worlds,

O thou with thy hair unbound ungarmented !

On the open lotus-flower

Of the world's desire thou hast poised thy
lotus feet

Ever so light !

In the whole heaven of the mind endless is
thy delight,

O companion of dreams !

Hark ! all around heaven and earth are crying
for thee,

O cruel, heedless Urvasi !

Will the ancient and pristine of cycles come back
to the earth,

From the fathomless, shoreless sea, wet-tressed,
wilt thou rise again ?

First will that form appear in that first morn,
All thy limbs will weep hurt by the eyes of the
universe,
Dripping the water from thy loveliness.
On a sudden the great ocean will heave and roll
To a song unsung before.
Never again, never again! That moon of glory
has set,
On the mount of the sunset dwells Urvasi.
So on the earth today in the burst of joy of the
spring
Whose long-drawn sigh of parting eternal comes
mingled with the notes of mirth?
On the night of the full moon when all around
is full laughter
Whence come the tunes distraught of the lute of
distant memory?
The tears flow in flood.
Still hope keeps awake in the weeping of the
heart,
O thou without bonds!



Weariness

In the full moon and the soft breeze
Oft the thought comes to me,—
If this weary life were to close
As droop the eyelids in sleep;
The open-eyed sky awake to the moon,
The windows open to the wind;
In the distance strike the hours,
The river flows slow;
Both banks are deep in slumber;
The sailor sings to himself
Songs of old minstrelsy.
From the eyes flow in tears
The memories of a whole life;
And life flows down the stream of dreams,

From dreams to the dreamless deep
As the lamp floating down the river
Is snuffed out by the breath of the wind,
And sinks to the cool depths below.





The Sweetness of Death

Softly says my soul, O sweet Death,
Is this thy blue robe, is this thy mansion?
Meseems today on this green-clad land
Thou hast spread thy soft wide couch;
On land and water sports the rain;
This peace, this beauty are all thine own.
Failing to meet thee methinks
I am of little account in this wide world.
With calm, pitiful eyes and smiling lips
Thou callest me from all creation;
Beholding thy great, sweet image
The bride has overcome the dread of the first
meeting.
All around ring the wedding bells,
Everywhere I behold thy embrace!

The King's Justice

Into the presence of the King¹

Rushed the wrathful Brahmin;

'Sire,' said he, 'in the chamber of my wife

'Entered a thief at night

'To steal her honour;

'I have found and bound the thief,

'How shall I punish him?'

'Death,' answered the King.

Running came the King's messenger,

Panting and wild-eyed;

'Sire,' said he, 'the thief is the prince, your son;

'The Brahmin caught him at night

¹ Raja Ratan Rao of Rajasthan.

‘And hath slain him even now;

‘We have brought the Brahmin in bonds;

‘How shall we punish him?’

‘Liberty,’ answered the King.





The Newcomer

To you people of pleasure in your gay
House of the world
Came an unknown, frenzied guest
For a moment;
For a moment he gazed around
With eyes wild with pain and desire.
He wore no festive dress,
Nor a chain round his neck,
But out of his long, matted hair
Darted tongues of a fiery flame.
Your laughter and your songs
Ceased abruptly as he came.
Not one spoke, not one asked his name.
A moment he stood in the lamplight,
And out again he passed into the darkness.



Inspiration

I love the light dancing on the leaves,

The wild wind in the *sal* forest intoxicates me ;
Along the red earth of the road

The good man hurries to the market,
The lonely little girl plays in the dust.

What I see in front of me
Is like a harp playing in my eyes.

My reed is but a bamboo pipe,
And I play the tunes of the fields.

The children that have drunk
Of the new light of the blue sky—

I have filled my eyes with their glances
And I have attuned my harp

To the music of their young voices.

*Sunday*¹

1

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and all other days
come quickly from afar,

I'm sure they have got each one a big motor car!

Mother dear, why does Sunday tarry his ways,

Why does he come slowly, oh, so slowly,
after all the other days?

Is his little home beyond the sky—very, very far,

And is he very poor, and has he no motor car?

2

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday come as if
they mean to stay,

They never think of their homes, they never
dream of going away.

¹ The translation of this poem slightly differs from the original.

O mother, why is Sunday in such an awful hurry,
And the hours strike like half hours as if
they are in a flurry?
Has he a lot of work to do in his home
beyond the sky,
And is that why he leaves us with such a
heavy sigh?

3

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday have faces
dark as thunder,
They frighten little children and drive them
to school helter-skelter;
But when I awake at the close of Saturday night
Sunday greets me sweetly with a smile,
radiant and bright.
And when he goes he looks at us with eyes
filled with tears,—
Mother darling, how I wish he would come
every day through all the years!

The Palm

Standing on one leg,
Topping all other trees,
The palm peeps into the sky;
It wishes to pierce the black clouds
And to fly away;
But where are its wings?

On the round leaves on its head
It spreads out its desire;
These are its wings it fancies,
And it may fly away
Leaving its home.

All day the leaves tremble and flutter
As if to rise in the air;

And the palm thinks it will roam
Through the sky, soaring
Beyond the stars.

When the wind dies down
And the leaves cease to flutter,
Its fancy comes back.
It remembers its mother dust
And is content
With its corner on the earth.





Star Maidens

Look at the stars, mother, do you know them?

They never sleep and keep looking down
at the earth with wistful eyes.

Just as I have no wings and I cannot fly,
and I feel unhappy,

The stars are just as unhappy because they have
no feet and cannot come down to the earth.

Every morning you go down to the bend of the
river with the pitcher in the crook of your
arm to fetch water;

The stars look at their reflections in the water
and as hour follows hour they think
how happy they would have been if they
had been village maidens and could
swim in the full river with their pitchers
floating by their side.



The Mason

You think I am a little child, mother, but
you are wrong, for I am Noto, the
mason, and I am thirty years old.

Every morning I ride a cart and go to
the city and I lay bricks upon bricks
with lime and mortar and build a
wall as the fancy seizes me.

You think I play at building with pebbles and
stones, but I tell you I build real mansions;

They are not small houses for I build up three
storeys and stout pillars;


But if you ask me why I stop there and
why I do not go on raising floor
upon floor until the roof reaches
the stars, I am sure I cannot tell you
and I wonder myself why I should
stop anywhere at all.

I mount up the scaffolding whenever I like
and it is greater fun than mere play.
I hear the workmen and women singing
while building and beating and levelling
the roof, the carriages rattling
along the streets, and the street music
of the hawkers and vendors of metal-
ware and fruit ; in the afternoon the
children run home from school and
the crows fly cawing to their nests.

You know, mother, I live in the little village by
the side of the pond ;

But if you ask me why I live in a hut covered
with straw while I can build big
houses of bricks and why my house
should not be the biggest of all, I am
sure I cannot tell you.





Exchange

If you were the sky, mother,
And I the *champak* tree,
Without words we would have danced
The dance of words.
Your winds would have called me
As they went past
Dancing all the while on my branches;
'Mummie,' I would want to say,
But where could I find a word?
And so my call would dance
On my leaves.
On my dewdrop your light
Would sway about and whisper in my ears
In sparkling song.

I would make my buds burst in bloom

Any they would break into a dance

While trying to speak.

The shadow of your passing cloud

Would mingle with mine and fly away,

And that would be like

The fairy stories of a cloudy day.

Of a sudden the rain would come

Following your wind;

Your clothes would be a deep blue

And mine a forest green.

The light would be your laughter

And my leaves would dance;

You would look down from above

With eyes wide open,

I would sway and lift my arms

In silent song.

You would always wear

The chain of jewelled stars,

I would adorn myself

With my blooming flowers.



The Glow-Worm

Little firefly, how joyously you spread your wings
In the woods in the dark twilight!
You have poured out your heart in gladness.
You are not the sun, you are not the moon,
But are you happy any the less?
Your life you have fulfilled,
You have lighted your own light;
What you have is your own,
To none are you indebted;
You have obeyed only
The power in yourself.
You have burst the bond of darkness,
You are tiny but you are not little,
For all the lights in the universe
Are your kin.

Song of the Tree

My moonlight,
On this April eve you are caught
In my branches and leaves ;
The song that in the stream of your tune
Floods the stars.

Sounds now in my courtyard
While my heart keeps time.
All my buds burst into blossom
To the hint of your laughter ;
The south wind drunk with the scent
Of my flowers has lost its way.

O White, you have sent a wave of colour
Into my soul ;
My murmurous heart has been entangled
In the net of your laughter.

Song of the Boat

If thy open wind hit the sail

I am willing to tear the rope to shreds

And to sink.

Vainly has passed my morn

And the afternoon follows it;

Do not keep the boat longer

Tied near the shore.

Waking I have spent the whole night

Waiting for the helmsman ;

And through the livelong night

The waves have sported with me.

I'll make the storm my friend
I'll not be awed by his frown;
Let me go, oh, let me go,
I'll be happy to meet the storm.



AccountThe AccountThe AccountThe Acc

good deeds; good deeds; good deeds; good

with the world, with the world, with the world,

with the world, with the world, with the world,

with the world, with the world, with the world,

with the world, with the world, with the world,

with the world, with the world, with the world,

with the world, with the world, with the world,

with the world, with the world, with the world,

with the world, with the world, with the world,

The Fear of Death

To-day on the last day of the year,

Master Dominie,

Who do you seek to frighten with the fear of
death?

Boundless hope awakens to-day in the heavens,

In the wind flows the current of endless life;

In the joy of awakening laughs the world;

The deity is not an ogre opening the jaws of
death,

You are frightening others with mere pretence.

To forget God were a lesser loss,

Fear is a bitter lack of faith in him.

He himself hath kept us forgetful

Of death in the shelter of the world.

Who are you that lift the harsh note of terror?

Joy is the worship of him who is full of joy.

The Unseen Musician

When the world is plunged in slumber
And the sky is dark,
Who sweeps his fingers over my lyre
With such power?

Sleep has been snatched from my eyes,
I sit up on my bed;
I open my eyes and look around,
But nowhere I find him.

My soul is filled with the throbbing,
Murmuring melody;
I know not what great voice
Thrills with distracting music;

I know not with what anguish,
With the heart full of tears,
Round whose neck I want to fling
My own necklace!



The Master Piper

Strike dumb thy babbling poet,

Take away his heart-lute

And play upon it

Thy own profound measure

Pipe full in the depth of the night

The deep note of thy own nocturn—

The notes that fill the planets and the moons

With boundless amaze.

The long-garnered heap of my words

Will be swept away in a moment;

I shall listen to thy music in silence

In the shoreless dark.

The Right Note

Nowhere else but in thy own self

Sounds the false note ;

It is not in harmony

With the glad morning light,

And it covers all joy with a veil.

Hush thy wild jangle !

In silence cast thy eyes around.

It is thy heart that blooms

As a flower on the tree ;

The stream of the river flows

For thy sake.

The Victor

He hath a sword in one hand,
A garland of flowers in the other ;
He hath burst open thy door !

He cometh not for the beggar's dole,
He will fight and win thy soul ;
He hath burst open thy door !

Through the roadway of death
He cometh in the midst of life,
In a warrior's guise ;

He will not go back
With half of what thou hast,
He will possess all ;
He hath broken open thy door !



Submission

Hold down my head

In the dust of thy feet,

Drown all my pride

In the tears of my eyes.

Let me not proclaim myself

In my own work ;

Fulfil thy own will

In the midst of my life.

I seek thy final peace,

Thy beauty in my soul ;

Stand thou on the lotus of my heart

Hiding me from sight !

The Surrender

Make me forget all truth, all untruth,
Drown me in ecstasy ;
I want neither argument nor reason,
I know not bonds nor freedom ;
Awaken thy world-enveloping will in my soul !
Let the universe be plunged in the ocean of peace,
All joy and grief be silenced in the heart,
All words, all sounds, all endeavour be still ;
Sound thy heart-conquering word in the recess
of my soul !

Do Not Turn Back

If the portals of my heart
Are ever closed,
Burst them and come into my soul,
Lord, do not turn back.

If any day the strings of my harp
Resound not with thy name,
In thy pity tarry awhile,
Lord, do not turn back.

If when thou callest
The drowsiness of my sleep passeth not,
Smite and awaken me with thy thunder,
Lord, do not turn back.

If at any time on thy throne

I seat another without thought,

My King for all time,

Do not turn back !



The Step of the Lord

I hear thy step, Lord, on the shore
of my life ;

In the solitary silence, in the summer
air, the planets and stars in heaven
gaze with fixed eyes.

The stream of thought flows gently,
gently in my heart.

My eyes keep vigil like thirsty birds.
I have opened my ears in the depths
of my heart.

On what blessed morning wilt thou
stand in the tabernacle of my soul ;

I shall forget all joy and sorrow,
plunged in the waters of bliss !

Song of the Earth

O Silent, if you do not speak
I shall fill my heart with your silence.

I shall lie still
As the night lighting the winkless stars
Bows down with patience.

When the dawn comes and the darkness passes
Your voice will fall in a golden shower
Bursting the sky ;

Then in my bird's nest
What song will rise in your language ?
To your note the wild clinging plant
Will open her flowers.



The Lover

Not the path to heaven for thee,
For there sweet pleasure
Lays his net for thee.

At the end of the day,
At the end of the hot road,
Thou weenest that thy tears
Will be lost in the golden clouds.

Not for thee, not for thee !
Under the smile of the evening star
There will be no cool bed for thee.

Thy lover roams and never rests,
And out on the road he will take thee ;
Thy heart will burst and bloom
Into his adoration.

The Bridegroom

Because you and I shall meet

The heavens are full of light ;

Because you and I shall meet

The world is full of greenery.

Because you and I shall meet

The night is awake with the world in her arms ;

And the dawn opens the door in the east

With a burst of song.

The barge of the hope of union

Floats down the current that has no beginning ;

And the salver of welcome is loaded

With the flowers of many ages.

Because you and I shall meet
My soul attired as a bride
Moves through the cycles in the universe
Ever free to choose the Bridegroom.



Wishes

In the arbour of life

May thy tune play ever and ever !

May thy seat ever adorn

The lotus of the heart !

Charmed by the fragrance of thy heavenly garden

I wander over the beautiful earth ;

May the dust of thy feet

Deck my person for ever and ever !

May all bitterness pass

By thy blessed charm ;

May sweetness glow in and out of the heart

To the measure of thy song !

Thy pure silent smile
Spreads over the heavens ;
May thy majesty ever shame
All pride !



The Noon of Life

1

Light was life in the early years,
I fared forth in my own strength;
The long way of life I began in the fresh morn
As a pretence of play;
No pain in tears, no scorn in laughter,
There was no burning poison in words;
Care-free, unwrinkled was my smooth brow
Tranquil and bright with joy.

2

Crooked became the path, intricate became life,
And heavy grew its burden;

I was dragged down to the dust of the earth,

And I fell prone time and oft;

What faith is left in my own self?

In myself there is no hope;

My pride has been crushed and mingles
with the dust,

The garment that covered my shame
is torn to tatters.

3

So today again and again I hasten towards Thee,

O Thou the Help of the universe !

Filling infinite Time and measureless Space

On Thine own Self Thou retest ;

Standing a moment on the roadside

I behold Thy great universe ;

Where have I come? Where am I going?

On what path is the world moving?

Today I am quaffing the peace of Nature—

Consolation's perennial stream ;

Lifting my eyes to the heavens at night

I see millions of planets and stars—

As from the loopholes of darkest Night

Luminous glimmerings of Thy light !

O Thou mighty Gloom ! Thou mighty Light !

Unrevealed ! Ever Self-revealed !

When the burden of life was very light,

When there was no sin,

Then I never looked at Thee

And knew not Thy might ;

Thy fathomless peace, shoreless mystery,

Beauty infinite, incomparable ;

In silence, with rapt eyes, in deep wonder

I did not behold Thy world.

Far as the eye can reach the ears of corn
Filling the apron of the earth,—
From the heart of the world to mine own heart
Flows the current of life.

8

Ineffable thoughts fill the heart,
The tears rise to the eyes ;
My grief and separation melting, dripping,
Bedew the breast of the universe ;
In the midst of the halcyon peace of Nature
My life loses itself ;
The dust-laden stream of sin and sorrow
Mingles with the great heart of the ocean.

9

Love alone wakes blessed and sweet,
Lengthened is the course of life ;
Washed of dust grief and pain garbed in white
and peace

Look as the image of joy ;
Freed from bondage Self spreads out
In the wide, free world ;
The breath of the universe plays on the openings
of life
With an answering outburst of joyful music !



The Link

As the words of a verse

Are linked with rhyme,

With the same devotion

I shall hold you in my soul.

The bounds of my heart will quiver

With the chant of your glory;

The notes will be caught in my life

In ever varied joy,

As the words of a poem

Are linked in rhyme.

In the midst of all love and devotion

I shall seat the King of my heart;

—HUNDRED-THIRTEEN—

In the midst of your wide universe

You will abide with me,

As the words of poesy

Are linked in rhyme.



Truants

When my voice calls him

Where strays my soul ?

When the soul comes back

To its silent nest,

Why does my life roam about

In some unknown wilderness ?

When the folly of the world calls me

What becomes of my shame ?

When the Dispeller of darkness

Flashes his scimitar of light

Then my soul overcome by shame

In a dark corner hides her face.

Half and Half

Thy net is spread over the world,

How can I escape ?

Half am I caught,

The other half is free.

Sometimes in forgetfulness

My heart opens itself,

But I hide it again.

Outside I am like an oyster-shell,

Hard and close ;

Inside me there is for thee

A single tear-pearl.

My heart wants to gaze at thee,

Never winking,

Why do not the eyes turn toward thee?

Half am I caught,

The other half is free.



The Lotus of Light

Under the heavens hath bloomed
The hundred-petalled lotus of light;
Layer upon layer the flower-leaves
Spread all around
Covering the deep black waters
Of the night's darkness.
In the golden cell in the centre
I sit happy, my brother,
All around me spread slowly
The hundred petals of light.

The waves are rising in the sky,
The wind is blowing past;
Songs sound all around,
All around dances and runs life.

A soft skylful touch
Touches all my limbs.
Diving in this sea of life
With life I fill my breast ;
Surrounding me and circling through the sky
Passes the wind.



The Place of Gifts

Where you scatter your gifts

With a prodigal hand,

How will my spirit reach

That far-off shore ?

The sun and stars fill their golden pitchers

From the flow of liquid light.

How will my spirit reach that land ?

Where you take your seat

To give away your bounties,

How will my spirit approach your presence ?

Daily you pour out new measures of love

And spread out yourself.

How shall I reach that place ?

The Early Visitor

O Beautiful, this morning you came
With the sun-gold heaven-flower in your hand ;
The city slept, no wayfarer was abroad,
You passed alone on your chariot of gold ;
A moment you paused and looked
With tender eyes at my window.

With what scent was my dream scented ?
With what joy trembled the darkness
Of my chamber ?

My silent harp lying in the dust
Sounded untouched nor finger-swept.

In my laziness my mind was divided
In the desire to rise and hasten out ;
When I rose you had passed.

This morning you came, O Beautiful !

Forms of the Formless

Boundless, in the midst of bounds

 You play your own tune,

And so you are revealed in me

 In sweetness.

In many colours and many scents,

 In many songs and many rhymes,

O Formless, the mansion of the heart

 Is filled with your likeness.

When you and I mingle

 All becomes manifest ;

The sea of the universe

 Swings in swelling waves ;

Your light has no shadow

 For it is shaped in me,

And is beautiful with my tears.

New Worlds

Lord, as thy harp sounds in the dark,

Instantly blooms the star ;

Play upon it in sonorous music

In my soul,

And in the soul's dark depth will arise

A noble new creation ;

Layers of light will rise

On the other shore of the new sky.

Poet, in thy image of beauty

Will be delineated my likeness ;

There will be boundless wonder,

And thy glory will be unveiled ;

And I shall be blest with deathless joy

In the light of thy smile.

There and Then

Where my moving steps come to a halt,
There open the doors of the boundless.

Where my song is ended,
There is song's silent sea.

Where darkness veils my eyes,
There shines the light of the world unseen.

Outside the flower blooms and falls in the dust,
In the heart grows the ambrosial fruit.

When work becomes big as it grows,
Then comes to it large leisure.

When the I in me is finished and is still,
Then I become manifest in thee.

The Invitation

Come out of thyself,

Stand in the open ;

Within thy heart wilt thou hear

The response of all the worlds.

Let the great rising wave

Dance within thyself,

Let it shake thy whole soul.

Stand in the open, stand outside.

Thou black bee, take thy seat

In the blue of the sky,

With the gold pollen of the sunlight

Covering thee.

Where there is space unlimited,

There spread thy wings.

In the midst of all thou wilt be free,

Come out in the open !:



The Friend

Secretly thou comest in the dark night,

Thou art my friend ;

Thou drawest me to thyself with a rough hand,

Thou art my joy.

Thou art the charioteer on my chariot of sorrow

Thou art my friend ;

Thou art my peril, thou art my loss,

Thou art my joy.

Vanquish me, I am thine enemy,

Thou art my friend ;

O Terrible, thou art the dread of dread

Thou art my joy.

Come, thou thunder, pierce my heart,

Thou art my friend ;

O death, tear me from my bonds,

Thou art my joy.



His Road

Morn and eve
They hurry on many errands ;
I alone sit by the roadside
Picking thorns,
Morn and eve.

He will pass by this road
And I wait for him ;
Many thorns prick his feet,
He is covered with dust,
And I die of shame
Morn and eve.

Needless Quest

Whom shall I ask the way?

The road will unfold itself

To my questing eyes.

The shady trees on the roadside

Are mute ;

Their sweet eagerness finds vent

In blossoming the flowers.

When the daylight is spent

The evening star lifts up its lamp

Without a word.

The Pilot

Thou coward, the charge of the world
Is not thine ;

The helmsman is at the helm
And he will steer the boat to safety.

If the storm comes what does it matter
To thee?

Watch the play of the waves,
Why shouldst thou be afraid ?

Let the dense night come,
Let it grow dark ;

The helmsman is at the helm
And he will steer the boat to the other shore.

If thou lookest towards the west,
The sky is plunged in clouds ;
Turn thy eyes to the east—
The sky is filled with stars.
Dost thou think thy companions,
Because they are thy kin
Will find safety if thou
Hug them close?
The storm will rise, hearts will tremble,
Heavenward will rise the wail of despair.
The Pilot is at the helm
And he will guide the barge over the sea.



The Message

Let me mingle with them

That graze thy kine,

And pipe thy name on their reed.

On this stone-flagged shore,

In the din of the market-place,

What greed lured me to stray?


What is the call of the forest leaves,

Who beckons we with the finger-blade of grass?

Tae Lord of my life in a playful mood

Plays in the doll's house of the soul;—

A little bird brings me this message



The Harp of Fire

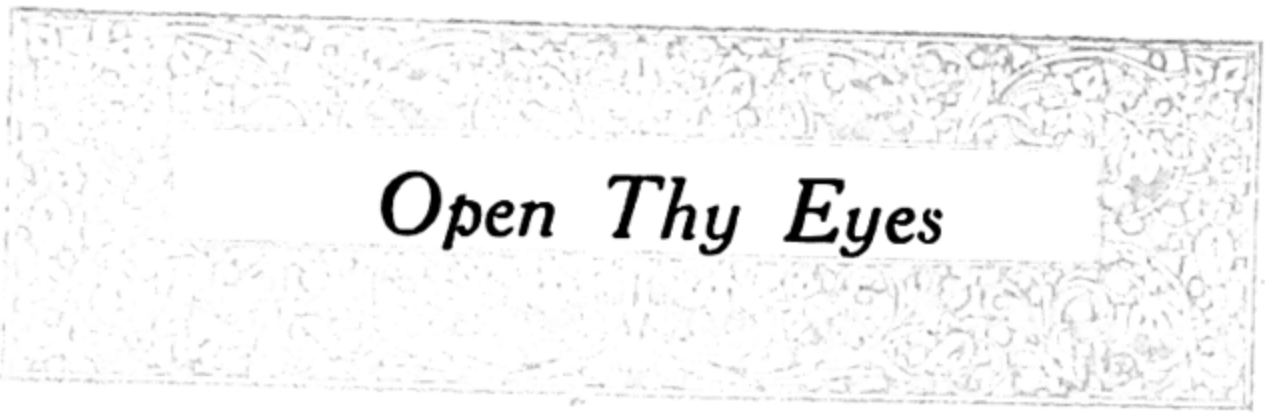
How dost thou strike
The harp of fire !
The sky trembles
To the song of the starlight.

So by thine own hand
Hast thou touched my agony;
Meseems a new creation
Hath awakened in my life.

Thou strikest the chord
Because it thrills ;
In the consciousness of that pride
Lord, my soul will endure all.

Smiting with thy fearful fire
My night again and again
Thou hast lit new stars
Filling them with pain.





Open Thy Eyes

Run not anywhere,

Open thy eyes and see ;

Behold, on the horizon of the eastern sky

The boat cometh spreading its golden sail ;

Open thy eyes and see.

On yon dark shore

Rises the song of gladness ;

After a long quest thy mariner

Hath reached the inaccessible and intricate shore

Beyond the stream of life ;

Open thy eyes and see.

Lo, thy distant bark

Is filled with light ;

The flowered wreath from an unknown garden
Is borne by the welcoming tray to its feet,
Filling the heavens with fragrance ;
Open thy eyes and see.





The Giver

Wealth untold is thine,
Yet thou art not content ;
Thou wishest to take it from my hand,
Dividing it to the minutest portion.
Thou hast enriched me
With thy treasure ;
When thou callest me at my door
I bar it against thee.
Thou wilt make me bountiful
While becoming a beggar thyself ;
And the whole universe
Is rocking with laughter.


Thou wilt not stay on the chariot

But wilt descend on the dusty road ;

Through all the ages thou wilt walk

On the road by my side.





The Magic Jewel of Fire

Touch my soul
With the magic jewel of fire,
Bless this life
With the gift of fire.

Lift up this body
Make it the lamp in thy temple ;
Day and night
Let the flame of light
Burn in my songs.

All night let thy touch
Pass over the dark
Blossoming new stars.

The blackness will vanish

From before the eyes,

Wherever they turn

They will find light.

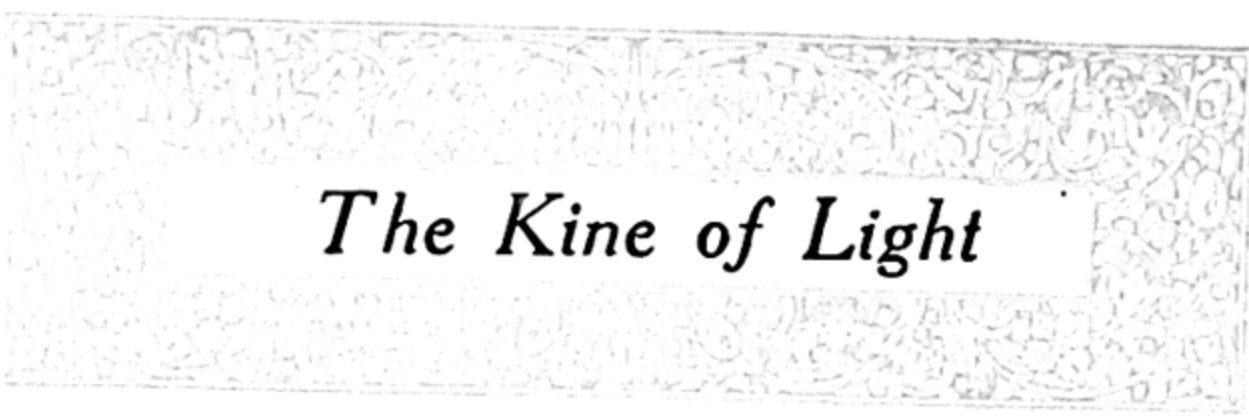
My anguish will be ablaze

And rise upward.

Touch my soul

With the magic jewel of fire!





The Kine of Light

Here are thy kine of light,

Herds upon herds of suns and stars !

Where dost thou sit and play upon thy pipe,

And graze thy cattle in the empyrean ?

The blades of grass raise their heads,

The green leaves stir on the tree

These are kine that feed upon the light,

They crowd upon the flowers.

In the morning they gallop away afar

Raising the dust under their hooves ;

At dusk playing the evening tune on thy reed

Thou bringest them back to thy fold.

My hopes and my yearnings
Wander away I know not where ;—
O thou Shepherd of my life,
Wilt thou pipe them back to thy fold
When the evening comes ?





My Part

The flower that the evening star
Offered at thy feet,
I washed with my tears.

At parting the rays of the pale sun
Recorded the tale of the day's travel
In letters of gold ;
I set it to tune on the pretence
That the song was my own.

Mounted on the golden chariot of light
Descended the night,
Filling with its darkness
I held out my heart.

Under the speechless sea in words that are lost,
In the large silence that fills the universe,
The current of my voice mingles
In silent tumult.

Fulfilment

Filling all my thorns with gratitude

The flower will bloom,

Oh, it will bloom ;

All my crimsoned anguish

Will blossom as a rose.

Long have I asked the sky

For the south wind,

And it will come speeding,

Rummaging and pillaging

My treasure of fragrance.

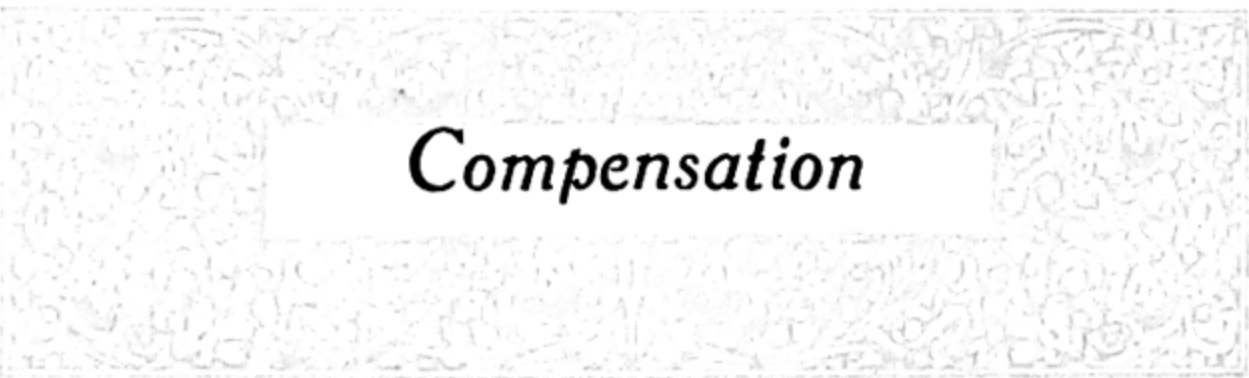
Then will pass my shame

When I have a gift worth giving,

When my soul's devotion

Will shape into a blossom.

When my friend will come at the dead of night
All the petals will leave the flower
And fall at his feet.



Compensation

There is sorrow, there is death,

The pang of parting ;

Yet peace, yet joy,

Yet the infinite are awake.

Ever flows life eternal,

The sun, the moon and the stars smile ;

The spring comes in diverse colours ;

The wave disappears and rises again,

The flower fades and again it blooms.

There is no loss, no end,

Never a sign of want.

At the feet of that Fullness

The soul seeks a place.

Safety

In my heart I have cut a path
Where fall thy feet ;
And all my soul quivers with pain,
Trembles like an aspen.

Thou art a traveller along the path of pain,
And pain is kissed by thy moving feet.
My worship has been with tears
All my life.

No longer am I frightened
By the flood of tears ;
The oars of death will row me
Across the sea.

The wild song of the storm
Sweeps towards thee ;
I shall sink the boat and leap
And find thy feet,
Find safety by holding thy feet.



A Boon

Grant thou me this boon
That I may awaken from death
To the note of a song.

As I open my eyes,
May the new life fill me
Like a mother's milk,
To the music of a song.

There the grass and the trees
Rise like songs
To the piped music of the earth.

The glad voice of the sky
Is borne by the light,
And moves round the heart
To the tune of a song.

Thy Songs

Each day I shall sing

Thy songs ever so sweet;

Give thou me the words,

Give thou me the tune.

If thou dwell in the heart

On the open lotus-flower,

If thou fill my soul

With thy love,

Every day I shall sing

Thy songs so sweet.

If thou hear the songs

As we stand in thy presence,

If thy merciful eyes

Shed nectar upon us ;

If thou put forth thy loving hand

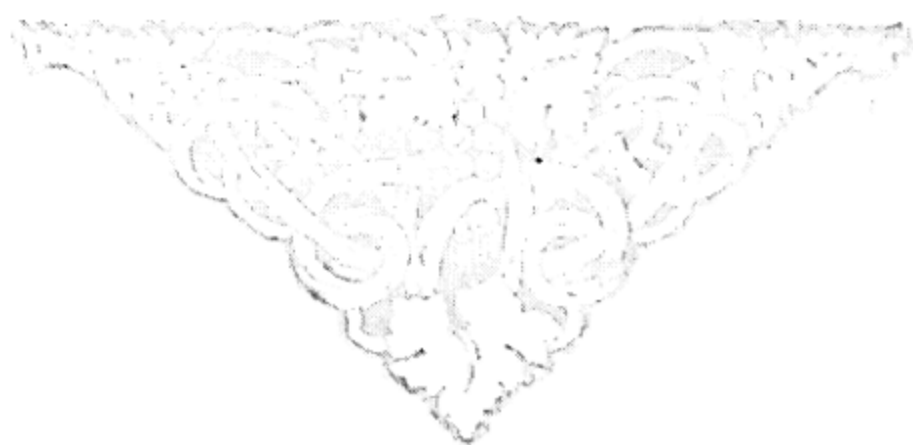
To heal our sorrow ;

If thou banish pride

From our joy,

Every day I shall sing

Thy songs so sweet.



Invocation

Carrying countless lamps

Round whose throne

Is the universe silently circling?

All around a multitudinous throng

With its joys and sorrows

Ever gazes at his feet.

Incessantly prays the sun,

‘Glance but once at my face

‘And I will give light to the world.’

Singing says the moon,

‘Lord, smile at me,

‘And I will give away

‘The nectar of moonlight.’

The cloud sings at his feet,

‘Grant me thy grace,

‘And I will give shade,

‘I will give rain.’

Ever sings the spring,

‘Speak thou words of hope,

‘And I will clothe the faded trees

‘With flowers and fruits.’

Men and women

Pray with clasped hands,

‘Fill our heart with springs of love,

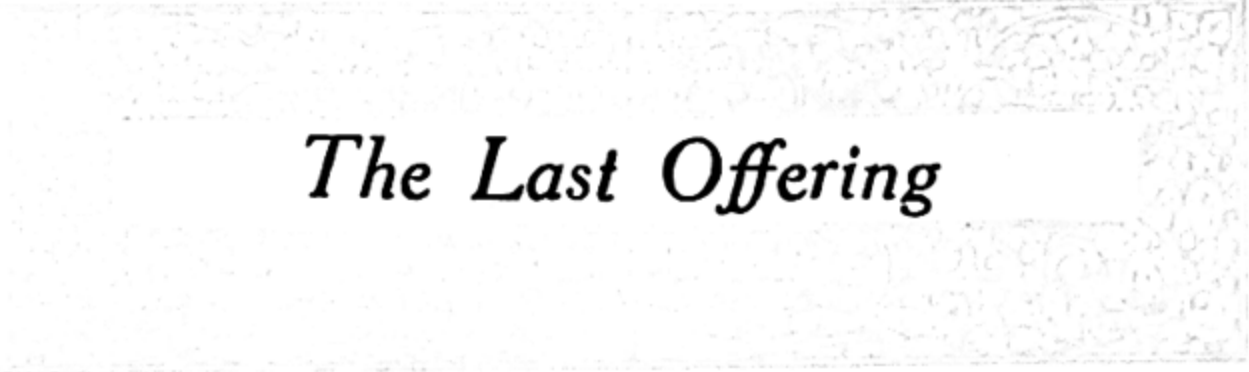
‘And they will flow over the world.’

In language that has no words

To whom does the world ever cry,

‘Fulfil, oh, fulfil our prayers!’

THE
SUNSHINE
LIBRARY



The Last Offering

The flowers are finished,
So is my song,
Accept my last offering, Lord !

I have brought to thy feet
The lotus of my tears ;
Take me by the hand,
Take my soul,
Take my last offering, Lord !

Brush aside all my shame,
Cast away my fear ;
All the bitterness of my heart,
Vanquish it all.

Take the darkness of my night,

The lamp of my house;

Take all my strength, all my pride,

Take my last offering, Lord !

A Vision

Lord God of the universe !

In what form today

Art thou revealed before my eyes !

I have seen thee in the eastern sky

In my own land ;

Thy brow is the blue sky,

Ever bright in clear light ;

Bestowing the boon of fearlessness

Thy hand rises as the Himachal¹

In silent blessing ;

The sea touches thy feet

And washes away the dust ;

On thy breast lies at rest

The gleaming Ganga as a chain.

¹ The Himalayas.

I hear the psalms of thy praise,
In the hermitages of the past,
Rising from the hearts of sages immortal
And echoing in all the worlds !
In the morning, Lord, when thou art seen
In the east in the morning sun,
Covering thy face with a veil
Woven from golden beams,
From every side in Ind,
Mingling with the songs of the birds,
Rises from the silent throats of eld
The lofty chant of the Gayatri¹ hymn.

In the white lotus-heart of this ancient land
Stands the Muse at thy feet,

¹ The Vedic *mantram* about the sun-god.

And thy great Word rises in music

To the highest heaven!

Closing my eyes I look into the future

And I hear thy trumpet of triumphant blessing

Pealing in my native land!



